



S E R M O N S
ON
VARIOUS SUBJECTS

BY
THOMAS AMORY, D.D.



FOLLOWING SUBJECT

S E R M O N S



VARIOUS SUBJECTS

THOMAS BYRON

THOMAS AMORY, D.D.

S E R M O N S

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS;

V I Z.

The DIVINE OMNIPRE-
SENCE.

The ASCENSION of
CHRIST.

The Obligation to search
the SCRIPTURES.

The Blessedness of those
to whom to live is
CHRIST, and to die
is Gain.

Our Times in the Hand
of GOD.

The Shortness and Frailty
of Human Life.

The Character of the ha-
bitually Religious.

GOD's crowning the Year
with his Goodness.

B Y

THOMAS AMORY, D. D. *K*



L O N D O N:

Sold by JAMES BUCKLAND, in Pater-Noster-Row; and
WALLIS and STONEHOUSE, in Ludgate-Street.

M.DCC.LXXV.

S E R M O N S

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS

VIZ.

The Divine Omnipresence.
The Ascension of Christ.
The Obligation to teach the Scriptures.
The Blessedness to whom Christ is Giver.
God's crowning the Year with his Goodness.
The Character of the spiritually Religious.
The Shortness and Futility of Human Life.
Our Times in the Hand of God.



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MDCCLXXV.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT may be proper to inform the Reader, that the worthy Author of these Discourses, some time before his Death, intended to publish Two Volumes of Sermons; and had made some Progress, in preparing them for the Press.

On examining Dr. AMORY'S Manuscripts, only Thirteen were found, transcribed by himself, from his Short-hand Notes, and had marked out others, with the same View; but Death prevented the Design from being accomplished, and no one could be met with, capable of decyphering the DOCTOR'S Short-hand.

Those which follow the Thirteenth Sermon were printed separately, some Years ago; and by being now inserted, will be preserved,

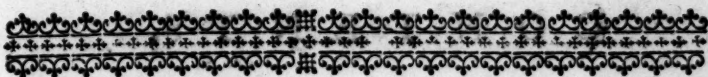
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served, and rendered more extensively useful.

The Reader will find, that this Volume (as well as the Two before printed) has this to recommend it, that it contains not Matters of angry Controversy, or doubtful Speculation, but important Principles of Religion, and Sentiments in which the Generality of judicious Christians agree.

The Chronological, and particular Account, of the WRITINGS of Dr. AMORY, was drawn up by his intimate and valuable Friend, the Rev. Dr. FLEXMAN, who preached the Funeral Sermon, at the OLD JEWRY, July 10th. 1774. The Dr. dying June 24th, in his Seventy Fourth Year. 24 OC 62

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A Chronological and particular Account
of the WRITINGS of the Reverend
THOMAS AMORY, D.D. 515

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S E R M O N I.

The Divine Omnipresence explained
and proved.



JEREMIAH, xxiii. 23, 24.

*Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and
not a God afar off? Can any hide him-
self in secret places, that I shall not see
him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill Hea-
ven and Earth?*

THESE words offer to our se-
rious consideration the Omnipresence of God, a most impor-
tant truth; of which I would
now treat, that the apprehension and be-
lief of it may become familiar to our
minds, and that we may always behave
worthy the divine Presence. Then shall
we enjoy the noble satisfactions which arise
from a consciousness that we are approved
and

SERMON
I.

B

and

SERMON

I.

and favoured by an ever-present God; and all the happiness included in his protection, guidance, and supplies during this life, and from his immediate presence and full favour to eternity. May the always-present Jehovah, who hath an immediate access to every mind, make this endeavour successful!

In discoursing on this subject, I shall

I. *Explain* what is meant by this perfection which *Jehovah* in the text challenges to himself, *Omnipresence*, or *filling Heaven and Earth*.

II. *Prove* that God is every where present.

III. Direct your attention to some *truths* included in this, or consequent from it. And

IV. Mention the *practical improvement* we should make of this doctrine.

I. I am to *explain* what is meant by the *Omnipresence of God*; or his *filling Heaven and Earth*. If we reflect upon ourselves we may observe, that we fill but a small space, and that our knowledge or power reach but a little way. We can act at one time in one place only, and the sphere of our influence is narrow at largest. Would we be witnesses to what is done at any distance from us, or exert there our active powers, we must remove ourselves thither. For this reason we are necessarily ignorant of a thousand things which pass around us, incapable

incapable of attending and managing any great variety of affairs, or performing at the same time any number of actions, for our own good, or for the benefit of others. SERMON
I.

Altho' we feel this to be the present condition of our being, and the limited state of our intelligent and active powers, yet we can easily conceive, there may exist Beings more perfect, and whose presence may extend far and wide. Any one of whom *present* in, what to us are, *various places*, at the same time, may know at once what is done in all these, and act in all of them; and thus be able to regard and direct a variety of affairs at the same instant. And who further being qualified, by the purity and activity of their nature, to pass from one place to another with great ease and swiftness, may thus fill a large sphere of action, direct a great variety of affairs, confer a great number of benefits, and observe a multitude of actions at the same time, or in so swift a succession, as to us would appear but one instant. Thus perfect we may easily believe the *angels* of God to be, who according to the *vision of Daniel*, were intrusted with the superintendence of empires. x. 13.

We can further conceive this extent of presence, and of ability for knowledge and action, to admit of degrees of ascending perfection

SERMON

I.

perfection approaching to infinite. And when we have thus raised our thoughts to the idea of a Being, who is not only present throughout a large empire, but throughout our world; and not only in every part of our world, but in every part of all the numberless suns and worlds which roll in the starry Heavens—who is not only able to enliven and actuate the plants, animals, and men who live upon this globe, but countless varieties of creatures every where in an *immense universe*—yea, whose presence is not confined to the universe, immeasurable as that is by any finite mind, but who is *present every where in infinite space*; and who is therefore able to create still new worlds and fill them with proper inhabitants, attend, supply, and govern them all—when we have thus gradually raised and enlarged our conceptions, we have the best idea we can form, of the universal presence of the *great Jehovah*, who *filleth Heaven and Earth*. There is no part of the universe, no portion of space uninhabited by God, none wherein this Being of perfect power, wisdom, and benevolence is not essentially present. Could we with the swiftness of a sun-beam dart ourselves beyond the limits of the creation, and for ages continue our progress in infinite space, we should still be surrounded

with the divine Presence; nor ever be able to reach that space where God is not. SERMON
I.

His Presence also penetrates every part of our world; the most solid parts of the earth cannot exclude his presence, which pierces as easily the center of the globe, as the empty air. All creatures *live and move, and have their being in him.* And the inmost recesses of the human heart can no more exclude his presence, or conceal a thought from his knowledge, than the deepest caverns of the earth. Acts
xvii. 28.

The scriptures indeed represent a place called *Heaven*, as in a peculiar manner the habitation of God. Not that we are to conceive of this great Being as confined to Heaven, or that he is not as really present in Earth, as in Heaven; but this form of speech is used in condescension to our capacities. God is said to be, and to dwell in Heaven, because he there manifests his *presence* in a manner peculiarly glorious and majestic. There, amidst a sensible glory, a light to mortals inaccessible, he receives the homage and worship of the noblest beings, declares his will, as once from Mount *Sinai*; communicates his counsels, and pours out his benefits. On a like account also, the infinite Jehovah, whom the *Heavens* could not contain, is yet praised by *Solomon* for residing in the temple at *Jerusalem*; Matt.
vi. 9. vii.
11.

1 Kings
viii. 27.

1 Tim.
vi. 16.

SERMON *salem*; because by a bright cloud which
 I. filled the most holy place, and a splendor
 darting from thence, God was pleased to
 manifest a special regard to the pious wor-
 shippers before that place; and hereby to
 assure them of a favourable answer to their
 prayers. Thus also this God, who is pre-
 sent every where, dwells peculiarly in the
 hearts of the humble, the pure, the pious
 and upright, influencing their minds, so as
 he does not influence the minds of others;
 and conferring upon them benefits, denied
 to persons unqualified for these communi-
 cations, and therefore destitute of them;
 tho' alike surrounded with the presence of
 this infinitely beneficent Being.

1 Kings
 viii. 11.

Isaiah
 lxvi. 2.

To sum up this explication of the di-
 vine Omnipresence. When we say God is
every where present, the meaning is this—
 that an alwise, almighty, and most perfect
 mind is present in every part of the uni-
 verse, and of the boundless space beyond
 it; that he sees and knows all that is
 thought or done every where; acts, or can
 act, every where; and is capable of effect-
 ing in all places, whatever is worthy of an
 infinite and all-perfect mind. For where-
 ever God is, there infinite perfection is, and
 there is no part of the universe, or of space,
 where God is not.

The

The proof of this assertion, I shall SERMON
I.
II. attempt. And that God is present every where is the dictate both of Reason and Revelation.

The absolute Omnipresence of God is thus proved by Reason. We and all created beings have but a certain extent of being, knowledge, and activity, and can fill but a determined measure of space at once; because the wise pleasure of our Creator limited our being, fitted us to fill such a portion of space, and such a sphere of action, and no larger. But the first cause, the supreme all-perfect mind, as he could not derive his being from any other cause, must be independent of all other, and therefore unlimited. He exists by an absolute necessity of nature, and as all the parts of infinite space are exactly uniform and alike, for the same reason that he exists in any one part, he must exist in all. No reason can be assigned for excluding him from one part, which would not exclude him from all. But that he is present in some parts of space, the evident effects of his wisdom, power, and benevolence continually produced, demonstrate, beyond all rational doubt. He must therefore be alike present every where; and fill infinite space with his infinite Being. This is the easiest metaphysical proof of the divine Immen-

SERMON

I.

Acts
xiv. 17.

sity that I know. But as this sort of reasoning is above the understanding of the generality, I shall not enlarge on it, but rather represent to you some of the proofs of this truth, which are supplied by the continual effects of the divine Presence; proofs which the generality, with a moderate attention, may discern to be conclusive; and which God has multiplied throughout the world. *He has not*, says St. Paul, *left himself without witness* of his constant Presence, *since he does good to all, giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons.* And if we will but seriously consider things, we may clearly discover his Presence, *behold his wisdom, power, and benevolence*, exerting themselves in the continued beauty and fertility of the world; and even feel his *hand* upholding our lives, and taste his bounty in every good thing we enjoy.

You then, who are desirous of acquainting yourselves more with God, of clearly discerning the always-present Jehovah, and of behaving towards him, so as that he prove your constant friend and sure confidence, (and what rational person but will desire this as his greatest happiness) be attentive, while in some of his works I shew you the Presence and Perfections of God;

in

in whom we all live, and move, and have SERMON
I.
our being.

It is a most evident and acknowledged truth, that a Being cannot act *where it is not*; if therefore actions and effects, which manifest the highest wisdom, power, and goodness in the author of them, are continually produced every where, the author of these actions, or God, must be continually present with us, and wherever he thus acts. The *matter* which composes the world is evidently lifeless and thoughtless, it must therefore be incapable of *moving itself*, or designing or producing any effects which require wisdom or power. The matter of our world, or the small parts which constitute the air, the earth, and the waters, *is yet continually moved*, so as to produce effects of this kind; such are the innumerable herbs, and trees, and fruits which adorn the earth, and support the countless millions of creatures who inhabit it. There must therefore be constantly present, all over the earth, a most wise, mighty, and good Being, the author and director of these motions.

We cannot, it is true, see him with our bodily eyes, because he is a *pure spirit*; yet this is not any proof that he is not present. A judicious discourse, a series of kind actions, convince us of the presence of
of

SERMON

I.

of a friend, a person of prudence and benevolence. We cannot see the *present mind*, the seat and principle of these qualities; yet the constant regular motion of the tongue, the hand, and the whole body, which are the instruments of our souls, as the material universe, and all the various bodies in it, are the *instruments* of the Deity, will not suffer us to doubt, that there is an *intelligent* and *benevolent* principle within the body, which produces all these skilful motions and kind actions. The sun, the air, the earth, and the waters, are no more able to *move themselves*, and produce all that beautiful and useful variety of plants, and fruits, and trees with which our earth is covered, than the *body* of a man, when the *soul hath left it*, is able to move itself, form an instrument, plough a field, or build an house. If the laying out judiciously and well cultivating a small estate, sowing it with proper grain at the best time of the year, watering it in due season and quantities, and gathering in the fruits when ripe, and laying them up in the best manner—if all these *effects* prove the estate to have a *manager*, and the manager possess of skill and strength—certainly the enlightening and warming the whole Earth by the Sun, and so directing its motion and the motion of the Earth as

to produce in a constant useful succession day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest; the watering the Earth continually by the clouds and thus bringing forth immense quantities of herbage, grain and fruits—certainly all these effects continually produced, must prove that a *Being* of the greatest power, wisdom and benevolence, is *continually present* throughout our world, which he thus supports, moves, actuates, and makes fruitful.

SERMON
I.

The *fire* which warms us knows nothing of its serviceableness to this purpose, nor of the wise laws, according to which its particles are moved to produce this effect. And that it is placed in such a part of the house, where it may be greatly beneficial and no way hurtful, is ascribed without hesitation to the contrivance and labour of a person who knew its proper place and uses. And if we came daily into an house wherein we saw this was regularly done, though we never saw an inhabitant therein, we could not doubt, that the house was occupied by a rational inhabitant. Sirs, that huge *globe of fire* in the heavens, which we call the *Sun*, and on the light and influences of which the fertility of our world, and the life and pleasure of all animals depend, knows nothing of its serviceableness to these purposes, nor of the wise laws according

SERMON

I.

according to which its beams are darted; nor what place or motions were requisite for these beneficial purposes. Yet its beams are darted constantly in infinite numbers, every one according to those well-chosen laws, and its proper place and motion are maintained. Must not then its place be appointed, its motion regulated, and beams darted by almighty wisdom and goodness; which prevent the Sun's ever wandering in the boundless spaces of the heavens, so as to leave us in disconsolate cold and darkness; or coming so near, or emitting his rays in such a manner as to burn us up? Must not *the great Being*, who enlightens and warms us by the Sun, his instrument, who raises and sends down the vapours, brings forth and ripens the grain and fruits, and who is thus ever acting around us for our benefit, be *always present* in the Sun, throughout the air, and all over the earth, which he thus moves and actuates?

This *earth* is in itself a dead motionless mass, and void of all counsel; yet proper parts of it are continually raised through the small pipes which compose the bodies of plants and trees, and are made to contribute to their growth, to open and shine in blossoms and leaves, and to swell and harden into fruit. Could blind thoughtless particles thus continually keep on their way

way, through numberless windings, without once blundering, if they were not guided by an unerring hand? Can the most perfect human skill from earth and water form one grain, much more a variety of beautiful and relishing fruits? Must not the directing mind, who does all this constantly, be most wise, mighty, and benevolent? Must not the Being who thus continually exerts his skill and energy around us, for our benefit, be confessed to be always present, and concerned for our welfare?

Again; to create and bring into life a human mind, with such various and large faculties for action, knowledge, pleasure, virtue and happiness, must prove the *Author* of these effects to be possessed of the greatest conceivable power, wisdom, and benevolence; and wherever it is done, prove a Being endowed with these perfections, or which is the same thing, prove *God to be present*. How many thousand proofs have we then of the continual presence of God with us! As many as there are human beings created, and born into the world. Think a little, how many rational spirits, endowed with valuable powers and capacities, and cloathed with bodies, in the frame of which appear exquisite skill and great kindness, are continually created, and introduced into life. Parents cannot
claim

SERMON

I.

claim the honour of being the authors of these productions, who do not so much as know, *when* or *how* the bodies of their children are formed; and who are conscious to no such power as creating a mind, the nature of which is utterly unknown to them. Can these effects be ascribed to any below an alwise and almighty cause? And must not this cause be present, wherever he *acts*? Sirs, were God to speak to us every month from Heaven, and with a voice loud as thunder declare, that he observes, provides for, and governs us; this would not be a proof in the judgment of sound reason by many degrees so valid. Since much less wisdom and power are required to form such sounds in the air, than to produce these effects; and to give not merely verbal declarations, but substantial evidences of his presence and care over us. Must we not then, if we would not be chargeable with unreasonable stupidity and ingratitude, confess the great Parent of the human race always present, and always acting in us and around us, and greatly desirous of our welfare, to whom he gives continually life, breath, and all things?

To impress our minds more deeply with this great truth, I would instance some cases wherein we may most need or desire
a full

a full assurance of the presence of the Deity; and shew you by what easy reasonings we may satisfy ourselves of the constant presence and attention of our Creator, Preserver and Governor; and this I shall do in the next Discourse, and conclude this with a practical reflection or two.

SERMON

I.

1. Is God omnipresent? How *immense* the greatness and perfection of the Deity; and with what humility and veneration should we think of, and approach him! To be at once present all over this immense creation, and through infinite space, to actuate universal nature, continually to roll round the great bodies of the universe, the sun, the stars, and planets, to guide all the senseless and in themselves motionless particles of matter for the production of light, and rain, and plants, and trees, and fruits—to create at the same time in numberless regions of his boundless dominion countless varieties of living creatures, to maintain also in life and action every animal and rational creature, to supply all their wants, and direct all their motions and thoughts—to possess a wisdom which an infinite variety of affairs cannot perplex, a power not to be wearied by constant infinite exertions, and a benevolence inexhaustible by infinite communications of good,

SERMON

I.

Job
xl. 17.

good, and infinite supplies constantly derived from it.—What an exalted, what an astonishing idea of the divine grandeur and perfection; how adorable and how amiable; which while it attracts our contemplation, and excites to the utmost stretch of thought to take it in, is after all incomprehensible! *Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection? 'Tis higher than Heaven, what can we know, and deeper than the deepest parts of the Earth, what can we do? The measure of it is longer than the earth, and broader than the seas.* What are the greatest princes, what the most exalted angels, what are all created wisdom, power, or goodness, compared with God? These are all derived from him, dependent on him, and as nothing when set against his infinite perfection.

With what deep veneration and humility should we think and speak of this great God, and worship before him! Surely this is not a Being to be trifled with, that mortals should use his name on every mirthful occasion, sport with his majesty, and much less wantonly and profanely call for his displeasure in oaths and curses! Do these presumptuous wretches, who on every trifling occasion swear by God, and call upon him to damn them, or to damn others, know, that they trifle with and insult an almighty and

and ever-present God, before whom angels prostrate themselves, and at whose rebuke *the sun is darkened, and the pillars of heaven tremble?* To revile one of the greatest and best Princes to his face, when seated on his throne, and surrounded with guards prepared immediately to inflict the punishment deserved, would not be a thousandth part so stupidly insolent and guilty as thus to affront an almighty and ever-present God; whether by allowed irreverence and profane sporting, when we profess to worship him, or by impiously using his name in rash oaths and malicious curses. Do not these presumptuous wretches know, that their breath and life are in his hand, and at his frown they sink into hell? Let us shew ourselves rational beings, and sensible of what is great and venerable, by endeavouring to preserve lively in our minds exalted apprehensions of the infinite perfections of God, and a correspondent veneration. With what humility should sinful worms address this great and holy Being in prayer; and with what reverence speak of him! And as we are constantly surrounded with his presence, how constant should be our concern, that our every thought, and word, and action be such, as will bear the presence and observation of God!

SERMON

I.

C

2. Is

SERMON

I.

Psalms
lxv. 1.Phil.
iv. 6.

2. Is God always present? Hence we may learn the reasonableness of prayer, and particularly of secret devotion. The royal poet thus introduces his celebration of the universal Presence and Providence of God. *Praise waiteth for Thee in Zion; and unto Thee shall the vow be performed. O Thou that bearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.* If God be in reality the author of all good, is it not most reasonable to acknowledge him as such by constant grateful praises? And if he be always with us and constantly exerts his boundless perfections around us, what more reasonable than for necessitous and dependent creatures to address the best of Beings and Parents for the supply of their returning wants, and for security from evil? Should they not, as the apostle directs, *in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make their requests known unto God?*

My friends, when we advise you to pray unto God, we do not send you to a Being far removed from our world, unconcerned in its affairs, or unable or unwilling to answer the reasonable requests of his creatures. He is always present, upholding universal nature, actuating all causes, and directing all events. That he is not deficient in wisdom, power, or benevolence, the

the numberless instances of his kindness and bounty, continually produced, abundantly prove. And certainly this great Being, who constantly provides for creatures who cannot solicit his favour, nor know or own their obligations, and *who causes his sun to shine, and his rain to descend on the evil and unthankful*, will not refuse in a peculiar manner to direct, and bless, and succeed those, who are sincerely grateful for past benefits, humbly sensible of intire dependence, and heartily concerned by prayer and well-doing to be qualified for his special favour.

Do any of you then *want wisdom*? Ask it of God, *who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given*. Are you sensible of the force of temptations, and do you need superior strength? Address yourselves to God, who seeth your souls in all their weakness, and who hath an immediate access to them, and can insinuate the rules and motives of virtue in all their evidence and strength; or who commanding all events, can turn aside dangerous temptations, and direct things into such a train as shall establish your virtue and increase your happiness. Or have you reason to apprehend distress and want? Humbly apply to your heavenly Father; *who cloaths the lillies, and feeds the fowls of*

SERMON

I.

James
i. 5.

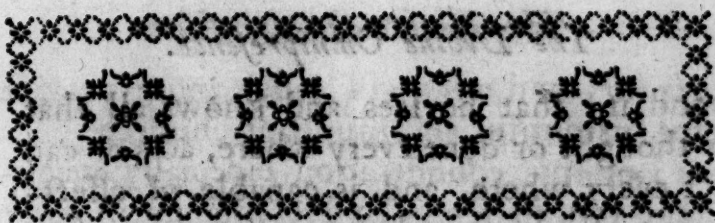
SERMON

I.

the air, and who will much more provide for his dutiful and suppliant children.

Let this consideration especially encourage you to fervor and constancy in *secret prayer*, that God is every where, and *seeth in secret*, and *will reward you openly*. Are you then solicitous for the conquest of some vicious passion, and your improvement in goodness; or for the right conduct of life in some important instance? With humble trust, in devout retirement, commend your case to God, who will be pleased with this instance of your sincere piety, and with every opportunity his rational offspring give him to communicate his favours to them. Though men know not your secret devotion, it will not be in vain; God, who is the only proper witness to it, will be the bountiful rewarder. As constancy and fervor in secret devotion are amongst the best proofs of a sincere piety, they qualify for the favour of a God who searcheth the heart. These have also the happiest influence on our tempers, naturally cherishing an habitual and delightful sense of God, a warm gratitude, and a settled tranquility, founded on a firm and rational persuasion of his continual presence and favour. God give us all the wisdom to make this happiness our own. Amen.

SER-



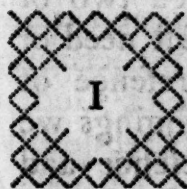
S E R M O N II.

The Divine Omnipresence farther
illustrated and proved.



J E R E M I A H xxiii. 23, 24.

*Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and
not a God afar off? Can any hide himself
in secret places, that I shall not see him,
saith the Lord? Do not I fill Heaven
and Earth?*



N a preceding discourse, I
I. Explained what is meant
by this perfection which Jeho-
vah challenges as his own, *Om-
nipresence, or filling Heaven and
Earth.* And the meaning is in short this—
That an alwise, almighty, and most per-
fect mind, is present in every part of the
universe, and of the boundless space be-
yond

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yond it; that he sees and knows all that is thought or done every where, acts or can act every where, and is capable of effecting in all places, whatever is worthy of an infinite and all-perfect mind. For wherever God is, there infinite perfection is; and there is no part of the universe or of space, where God is not. I also

II. Entered on the proof of this important doctrine, and insisted chiefly on this argument—That a being cannot act where he is not; and that God, in the frame and continual preservation of the world, in the continual production, preservation, and supply of innumerable, rational, and animal beings, has given, and continually gives, innumerable instances and proofs of his constant, powerful, and vital energy in us and all around us; and that of his constant presence with us and with all his creatures.

To impress this truth more deeply on your minds, I would now instance two or three cases, wherein we may most need or desire a full assurance of the presence of God, and shew by what easy reasonings we may satisfy ourselves of the presence and attention of the great Creator, Preserver, and Governor.

Are you then retired from the hurry of the world, for the better exercise of devotion; and removed from the observation of men;

men; endeavouring to raise and cherish sentiments of veneration, gratitude, and love to the greatest and best of Beings, and to increase and establish your love of goodness, and abhorrence of vice? Are you at the same time made uneasy by some doubts which arise in your minds, *whether God sees what passes within you*; whether he regards and approves your good desires and endeavours, and will aid and succeed you? To clear these doubts be pleased thus to reflect—"Our bodies are engines composed of ten thousand parts, curiously contrived, and skilfully wrought; and the keeping all these in regular motion, evidently requires the greatest skill in the director of the several motions. We have no claim to the honour of this skill. We know not how the blood is continually guided through its various channels, in its swift, regular, and unwearied course; or how the various juices are separated, and the nerves and muscles actuated to perform the several movements of the human body. We cannot therefore be properly the authors of these regular and well-directed motions. All we are conscious to, is this, that upon our willing to move the hand or the foot, these parts are immediately moved. Must not the Being therefore, who thus executes the dictates of our wills, know what passes

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in our minds, when we thus will? Must not the God, who preserves the regularity and activity of our bodies, be present with us? And can we then rationally doubt, whether our sincere love, gratitude, and concern to please God, are known and accepted by him?"

"We may farther observe, that in the memory are treasured the ideas of things we have seen, and of truths which we have discerned. Upon our wanting these, we find them returning to the view of the mind; though what these ideas are, how repositied in the memory, and how again produced to view, we know not. All our reasoning depends upon retaining and reviving these ideas. The laying up such large numbers of these without confusion, and bringing them forth when we want to observe them, must be confessed a work of great wisdom, and of a wisdom not our own. Can we then doubt whether the God who thus furnishes the materials for our contemplation, when we in thought only call for them; *knows our thoughts*, and how we employ those materials, with which he constantly supplies us?"

Should a person, intent on improving his knowledge, be placed in a library stored with valuable books of all kinds, and on his barely intimating what book he wanted, have

have it immediately brought to him by an SERMON II. invisible hand, and always the book which exactly suited his occasion and increased his knowledge; could he reasonably doubt, whether this was done by a Being who observed his every word and action, knew what was contained in all these books, knew his wants, and attended to his most secret desires? With as little reason can we doubt, whether God knows what passes within our minds, if we reflect, that upon our barely willing to consider any subjects, the proper ideas immediately rise to our mental view, though we ourselves know not how it is done. As long therefore as we continue rational creatures, we cannot rationally disbelieve the presence of God with us, or his knowledge of our thoughts; since we may feel him continually directing and assisting us in the exercise of our rational powers. With cheerful confidence we may therefore observe our Lord's command, and *pray to our heavenly Father in secret*, being thus assured, that *he seeth in secret, and will reward us openly.* Matt. vi. 5.

By reasonings like these David established himself in the belief, that God *understood his thoughts afar off*, or before they were compleatly formed; and *knew every word on his tongue*. He reflected on the wisdom discovered in the formation of his body,

Psalms cxxxix.

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body, the constant attention of which was as requisite to preserve in order the nice engine. *The darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee. FOR Thou hast possessed my reins, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. The substance of my body was not hid from Thee, when made in secret and curiously wrought, as far from human notice as in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eye did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them. Nor didst Thou then abandon thy work, thy continued attention was equally necessary to my preservation, and hath been as conspicuous in it. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God, and how great is the sum of them! How continued, how unwearied has been thy care and kindness! When I awake I am still with Thee.*

Let me put another case. Suppose you were overtaken on the ocean by a violent tempest. Do thick clouds cover the sky, and exclude all light, excepting what comes from dreadful flashes of lightening, darting through

through the gloom, increasing the dangers and heightening the horrors of the tempest? Does the stormy wind roar tremendous, and raising the waves in high watry mountains, threaten every moment to overwhelm you? Amidst these dangers are you inclined to call upon God; but fearful lest your feeble cries should be unheard in this tumult of nature; or least retired from this scene of confusion, the Almighty hath left the several elements to encounter, and exert their utmost violence? If by a sincere piety and goodness you have qualified yourselves for the divine favour and protection, and a longer life would be a real blessing to you, these and all other fears are vain. For an almighty and infinitely good God is as really present amidst this confusion, and as evidently demonstrates his presence, as in the most beautiful scenes of nature. The matter which composes the winds, the lightening, and the ocean, is in itself as motionless as the solid rock. All *natural causes* are the mere lifeless instruments of God; and it is his power, which darts the lightening, tempests the air, and heaves the ocean. The apparent greatness of the danger from this universal agitation, is only a stronger proof of the presence of the Almighty, whose power raised the storm, and who can as easily

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easily lay it. He hath left nothing to blind chance, but swells every wave, darts every flash, and sends forth every blast of air. He can therefore as easily deliver from this great danger as from the least; for certainly it does not require more power to lay a storm, than to raise it.

Jonah
ii. 5.

This *Jonah* experienced, who thus celebrated his Deliverer. *The waters compassed me about, the depth closed me round, the weeds were wrapt about my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her everlasting bars was about me. Yet hast Thou brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came unto Thee.* There is also as much strict truth, as sublime poetry, in this description of the psalmist. *They who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters, they see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep. For He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel too and fro' and stagger like a drunken man, and all their wisdom is swallowed up. Then cry they unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the*

Psalms
cvii. 23.

the storm a calm, and the waves are still. O SERMON
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that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men!

It were easy to carry the evidence of this argument through the whole system. For God having every where exerted, and continually exerting his wisdom, power, and benevolence in actuating dead matter, and by it producing effects, which evidently demonstrate the boundless perfections of their cause, hath every where left full proof of his universal presence. With the deepest veneration and humility let us therefore address this ever-present God, in the words of the pious king. *Thou Lord* Psalm
CXXXIX. 1.
hast searched me, and known me; Thou knowest my down sitting, and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways; and there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit; or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into Heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in the Grave, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell

SERMON II. *dwelt in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

This testimony of *Revelation* to the Divine Omnipresence is so express and full, that I need not cite any more texts as proofs. Let me however add to this, and some others which I have occasionally mentioned, two or three noble passages more, for impressing our minds the deeper with it. Thus saith *Jehovah*, *behold Heaven is my throne, and the Earth is my footstool; where is the house, that ye build unto me? God is not far from any of us, for in him we live and move and have our being. The Lord looketh from Heaven, he beareth all the sons of men; he fashioneth their hearts alike, he considereth all their works. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them who fear him, upon them who hope in his mercy. The Lord is nigh unto them who are of a broken heart, and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit.* To conclude this proof, how nobly does our divine Master represent the universal providence and energy of God, as an encouragement for the pious and good steadily to trust in him. Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life, which God preserves without your care, more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Isaiah
lxvi. 1.

Acts
xvii. 27.

Psalms
xxxiii. 13.
15. 18.

xxxiv. 18.

Matt.
vi. 25.

raiment? The keeping in order that curious engine more than covering it? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them; are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not cloathed like one of these. Wherefore if God so cloath the grass of the field, shall he not much more cloath you? And in the language of our Lord, and of truth, it is God our heavenly Father who causeth his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and who sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matt.
v. 45.

Allow me to close this proof with the testimony and reasoning of one of the most judicious of the antient philosophers SOCRATES. "Let your own frame instruct you. Does the mind inhabiting your body with ease dispose and govern it? Should you not then conclude that the universal mind with equal ease actuates and governs universal nature? You should not imagine, that while your eye can comprehend a large prospect, it is beyond the capacity of the divine eye to comprehend all things. And that when you can at once consider the in-
terests

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“terests of the *Athenians* at home, in
“*Egypt* and in *Sicily*, 'tis too much for
“the divine wisdom to take care of the
“universe. These reflections will soon
“convince you, that the greatness of the
“divine mind is such, as at once to see
“all things, hear all things, be present
“every where, and direct all the affairs of
“the world.”

The universal presence of God being thus abundantly proved by reason and divine revelation, I should next proceed to consider

III. Some important truths included in this of the Divine Omnipresence, or consequent from it; but reserving these for another Discourse, I judge it better to close this with some practical reflections.

I. Is God always present as the author of all good, actuating universal nature, and proving his presence by innumerable and continual benefits? Let us learn to ascribe all good to God, and cherish a warm and habitual gratitude and concern, to render unto God according to the benefits we continually receive. Are we pleased with the light and warmth and glory of the sun? Let us learn with all gratitude to ascribe the pleasure to God, whose almighty hand unwearied rolls round his vast body, and darts his beams, which other-
wise

wise would be without motion, light, or warmth. Does the earth, with its grand and beautiful prospects and various fruits, delight us? Let us give him the praise who made us capable of these delights, whose constant influences maintain the healthy state of our bodies, and the exercise of our senses, the inlets of this pleasure; and whose continual action on dead matter produces all this verdure, bloom, and fertility. Does a well furnished table gratify our palates, and feast our appetites? Let us learn to be grateful for these pleasures to God, whose bounty furnishes our table; who produces and maintains the animals which die for our support, and who moves the sun, the earth, and the waters, so as to produce all those agreeable fruits, which cheer the eye and gratify the taste.

Are we happy in the good qualities of a friend or a partner? Let us trace up our obligations to God, who formed them with these good qualities, whose influences continue us and them in life, and whose kind Providence favourably disposed us for this union. Are we blessed with the satisfactions of knowledge and goodness? Let us raise the enjoyment by gratitude to an ever-present God, who formed us with a peculiar disposition for these pleasures, whose

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influences

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James i.
17.

influences continue the regular action of our minds, and cherish our virtuous dispositions, and whose unceasing energy continues those grand and beautiful scenes which we contemplate with so much satisfaction; and adore the God *from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift*, who with an unabating flow of goodness produces and preserves an infinite variety of beauty, life, and good.

How reasonable the gratitude of thus acknowledging an ever beneficent God; and how noble the satisfaction of considering ourselves as the charge of almighty wisdom and immutable goodness! And how warm and cheerful should be our concern to make this ever present God proper returns of duty and obedience; employing our active powers conformably to his will who upholds them, enjoying his bounties with temperance and gratitude; and which is the most pleasing return of all, imitating his unbounded and ever active beneficence, by removing every evil which it is in our power to remove, and diffusing good as far around us as possible.

2. Is God always present with the pious and good? How great their security and happiness, how firmly should they trust in God, and what solid peace and contentment might they thus possess! In this universe

verse of creatures, which is the house and family of God, no event is left entirely to chance; or to the follies and vices of free beings, but all causes are overruled and all events directed by an every where present God; who will make *all things to work together for good unto them who love God; who will be a sun and a shield, give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them who walk uprightly.* God indeed permits, what men usually call evils, pain, sickness, disgrace, the loss of wealth or friends, to befall good men and bad; for these are necessary in a state of trial, as correctives of vice, or exercises of our trust in God, of meekness, patience, integrity, and the like virtues. But there is this wide difference between the state of the good and of the bad, under these disagreeable occurrences. To the bad they are real evils, punishments of sin, tokens of the divine displeasure, and sad earnest of heavier punishments in an approaching state. Whereas the pious and virtuous may be as certain as they are of the presence of God and of their own integrity, that none of these afflictions shall fall upon them, but when they may be made instrumental of much greater good; either by reclaiming them from some evil way, or by exercising and improving their virtues. And as they will

Rom.
vii. 28.

Psalms
lxxxiv.
11.

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thus increase their present satisfaction, and their final felicity, who would desire to be secured against afflictions upon better terms?

Unless the God whose bounty overflows the universe, and constantly supplies an infinite variety of creatures can be deficient in benevolence or power, they cannot fail of being supplied with whatever is convenient. Unless that infinite understanding, which by the best laws continually governs the natural world, can mistake as to what is best for them; or that power be overcome which upholds and actuates the universe; no real evil can oppress them, and no event turn out to them, but what is well fitted to promote their most solid satisfaction here, and their highest happiness in eternity. And unless the God in whom we all live and move, and who regulates every human mind, can be indifferent to the principal end of his government, the moral improvement and perfection of his rational creation; they will receive such assistances from him, as are necessary to their conquering temptations, discharging well their several duties, and improving continually in holiness and happiness. Always supposing that they are prevailingly concerned by purity of heart and life, by prayer and by a faithful improvement of the means
and

and abilities which God hath given them, SERMON
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to qualify themselves for divine aids, and to keep open the way for divine communications. Even in the hour of death they are safe and happy; for to them death is only drawing aside the veil interposed between them and an ever present God, and removing whatever hindered the full communications of his favour, and their completely knowing, loving, and enjoying the greatest and best of beings. As long therefore, as God is every where, and governs the world, you cannot place a good man in any circumstances, wherein he may not be content; and wherein all his valuable interests are not secure. Who would not above all things wish to be thus happy? As we are all rational and free creatures, enjoying the light and grace of the gospel, by prevailing piety and goodness we may all become thus happy. Let every one then immediately and heartily resolve for it, and may God succeed our vigorous resolutions and persevering endeavours.

3. Is God always present directing all events? Let this consideration dispose us to patience, submission, and contentment, even in the most afflictive circumstances. If God direct all events, all must be well directed. We can have no rational pretence for disputing the pleasure of our ab-

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solite proprietor; or for complaining of what is appointed by unerring wisdom and infinite goodness. Are you tempted to murmur, because a dear relation or friend is taken away by a death, which you think untimely? *If a sparrow falls not to the ground, without your heavenly Father's direction; much less a rational being.* God had certainly wise and good reasons for removing him, respecting your advantage, or his, or both. And if the same Lord, *who in kindness gave, hath in kindness taken away,* ought you not from the heart to say, *Blessed be the name of the Lord?*

Or are any tempted to complain, because poverty is allotted them? That most wise and good Being who directs the course of nature, appointed your birth from parents who have intailed this upon you. He without question, knew what part was fittest for you; in wisdom and gratitude you are therefore obliged to discharge cheerfully the part which he hath assigned you; rejoicing that by diligence, honesty, patience, modesty, temperance, and the like virtues, peculiarly becoming your station, you may approve yourselves to the supreme disposer, and secure the satisfactions arising from a sense of his favour in this life, and that everlasting blessedness with which his unbounded

bounded munificence rewards your diligence and fidelity in the life to come,

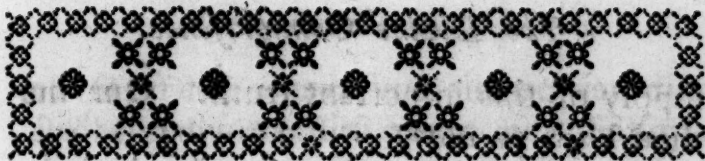
Is a sickly body the habitation appointed you in this world? God placed the soul in it, and for the best purposes continues you in it. It may be, he saw that constant health would have given to sensual pleasures a fatal power, and have led you to a forgetfulness of God, and to a disregard to virtue, and to the blessedness of immortality. His wise goodness therefore appointed this physick for you, which though disagreeable to sense, is necessary for the present health of the soul, and for its perfection and happiness to eternity. The like reasoning may be applied to every other afflictive case.

My Friends, discontent can only be justified upon a supposition, that things might have been better ordered for us; or that we are wronged, as to what we had a right to enjoy. But if *we all live, and move, and have our being in God, and even the hairs of our heads are numbered by him*, it is evident there can be no room for either supposition. God to whose free bounty we owe every good, it is certain can never wrong us; for whether he give or take away, it is all his own. And our heavenly father, whose power is almighty, his understanding infallible, and his goodness everlasting,

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can never permit any event, not fit to be permitted, can never mistake what is best for his children, nor ever be wanting in what becomes him, for promoting the happiness of his rational offspring in the ways of piety and goodness. With whatever ill intentions then others may act towards us, however liable we may be to mistake in our choice of designs or measures, we may yet be easy, and ought to be submissive. For God, who is always present and attentive, can never suffer these or any other causes to produce, what it was not upon the whole best to permit; and what we may not so improve as will be best for us in time and eternity. Affairs may be ill managed under the administration of wise and good princes, because neither their wisdom or power can reach to the direction of all affairs, or the providing for all cases; but under the government of an every where present God, the smallest affair cannot escape his notice, nor the mightiest opposition defeat his designs. Let us therefore be cheerfully resigned and humbly submissive, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding will possess our hearts. May he bless what has been offered to your thoughts, for making us all so wise and happy. Amen.

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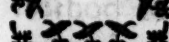
S E R M O N I I I .

Inferences Doctrinal and Practical
from the Divine Omnipresence.



JEREMIAH xxiii. 23, 24.

*Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and
not a God afar off? Can any hide him-
self in secret places, that I shall not see
him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill Hea-
ven and Earth?*

 **I** N two preceding discourses we S E R M O N
I I I .
have
 I. Seen what is meant by
this perfection of Jehovah, his
Omnipresence or *filling* Heaven
and Earth.

II. We represented some of the prin-
cipal proofs which *Reason* and *Revelation*
supply

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supply of this important truth. Our method leads us now

III. To consider some truths included in this of the *Divine Omnipresence*, or consequent from it.

1. It is one evident deduction from the *Omnipresence of God*, that he is a *Spirit*, and cannot be a material Being, or compounded of numbers of solid parts, as our bodies are, and as the air and sun are. All matter is by its nature confined to one determinate part of space for one time; and every portion of it necessarily excludes all other matter from possessing the same space at the same time. Even the thinnest bodies, such as the air, must be moved out of the place they possess, before any other body can take it. Were the Deity therefore corporeal, he would necessarily be excluded from all the space possessed by the matter of the universe. And should any imagine him to be like a fine ethereal fluid, penetrating all the vacuities in the bodies which compose the universe, his essence would then have innumerable divisions made in it, by all the solid parts of bodies.

Besides, *God is one*; the ether, the air, or the ocean, though called by one name, are not either of them one single being, but a collection of as many distinct beings as there are particles of ether, air, or water;

ter; since every particle of matter is a distinct being. Could God therefore be supposed material, as he is *One*, he could be but one particle of ether, consequently could be present but in one the smallest assignable portion of space, at one time, could act only there, and know only what was thought or done there; he could not be present and act every where, he could not be God. But it is a certain fact, that a most wise and powerful Being, or God, is present every where throughout the universe, actuating all the parts of it. This great Being therefore must be a mind or spirit, a pure uncompounded essence; of a nature which qualifies him to be present, and to act every where.

This also shews it to be very absurd to represent the Deity, or rather pretend to do it, by any material forms or images. All material beings are in their nature thoughtless, unactive, and confined to a small space. And if you suppose these material forms to be animated by an intelligent principle, such a principle, by this union, would be limited in knowledge and activity. Is it not then an high affront, instead of an honour, to an omnipresent, almighty, most wise, and ever-active Being, to represent him by bodily forms, by things in themselves void of life, power or wisdom? How
5 stupid,

II. xl. 12.

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III.

Deut. iv.
15.

stupid, and how repugnant to reason and scripture, the idolatry of the Papists, who in their churches represent and worship this infinite and all-perfect mind under the form of an *old man*; a poor feeble mortal, whose presence and knowledge are confined within very narrow bounds, and who is decaying and sinking into the grave! What an affront this to infinite Excellence, and without all excuse; after God has so expressly prohibited this idolatry in the Old Testament and the New! And when, to prevent any such corruption, God employed no material form or likeness in manifesting his special presence to *Israel*. *Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, said Moses, for ye saw no manner of similitude, on the day that the Lord spake to you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire; lest you corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure.*

2. The Omnipresence of God rightly apprehended, and thoroughly believed, renders easy the belief of his universal Providence. When we consider the infinitely various parts of matter which must be continually moved and directed by the Deity, in order to his exercising what we call a *natural Providence*—the infinite numbers of rays of light continually darted by him, of watery vapours continually raised and sent

sent down again, of vegetable oils, salts and the like, separated from the mass of earth and directed to their proper places for the growth and nourishment of every plant and tree—the infinite numbers also of particles composing the blood and juices of every animal, which, with the exactest skill, and according to the wisest laws, he moves and separates, and the like—when we consider this, we are overborne with the thought, that *One Mind* should be equal to the performing it; be capable of attending and executing all these infinitely various movements at the same time, and of directing all to the best ends, without confusion or perplexity. Yet that God really does all this we see and experience every day, and therefore we cannot rationally doubt it; and our seriously and justly considering his universal Presence removes the difficulty.

If a human mind present in one part of space can perform one action, and attend to one affair, the infinitely perfect mind every where present, may, with at least equal ease, attend to all. As he is necessarily intelligent, he cannot but know whatever passes under his view; and since he is infinite in knowledge and wisdom, he can as easily order all the affairs of the universe as we can a single action or affair. No wonder then, that *a sparrow falls not to the ground* Matt. x. 29.

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ground without our heavenly Father ; since wherever a sparrow falls God is present. Or that by him *even the hairs of our head are all numbered ; since we all live, and move, and have our being in him ;* and the growth of every part requires and is directed by his unerring skill. To be attentive to very minute affairs is reckoned a fault in men, because they cannot attend to these without neglecting greater and more important. But in the Deity, who, by his attention to the least, is not diverted from regarding the more important, this exact attention to all, really proves and illustrates the infinite capacity and activity of the divine mind. And our thinking of God as thus every where present, ever attentive and active, yet always undisturbed, is the grandest and worthiest idea we can form. Although as to the manner in which the Deity is every where, and attentive to all, we cannot form a just and distinct conception, but must humbly own with the pious king, *such knowledge is too wonderful for us, it is high, we cannot attain unto it.*

3. From this universal Presence of God, we may clearly prove his universal moral Providence, or his knowledge and observation of the thoughts and actions of all men, his love of righteousness, and his abhorrence of wickedness, and his suitably rewarding

warding or punishing the righteous and the wicked. This consequence is drawn from this truth in the text, or connected with it. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I should not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth?* And that God knows whatever is thought or done by men, you have seen proved from his constant Presence with them, and preserving the order of their minds, and assisting them in exercising their rational powers. And if there be a real difference in dispositions and actions; if some of these are proper objects of the approbation and reward of a most wise and good Being, and others of his displeasure and punishment; it is certain that a most wise and good God, a constant observer of these various dispositions and actions of men, will be differently disposed towards the persons whose they are; will approve and reward those who choose and practise what is deserving approbation and reward, and disapprove and punish those who do the contrary.

And, Sirs, what can be more evident, than this moral difference in dispositions and actions? Every man's reason in a thousand instances discerns it; and every man's experience assures him, that he can *choose the good, and refuse the evil*; and his conscience approves him when he chooses the

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the good, and condemns him when he does the contrary. Certainly then, the God who made us apprehensive of this difference in dispositions and actions, himself discerns it, and wills that we should conform to it. He, who hath taught us to approve what is just, kind, grateful, and modest, and to disapprove the contrary, does he not himself approve the one and disapprove the other? Must not a wise and good Being be differently affected towards gratitude and ingratitude, humanity and cruelty, fidelity and perfidiousness, temperance and intemperance? Will not a wise and good father love most a child, who is grateful, modest, benevolent, diligent and temperate? Must he not be displeased with the ungrateful, impudent, spiteful, lazy, and intemperate; who, instead of cultivating the peace and welfare of the family, disturbs and ruins it, filling it with disorder, strife and injuries? And can we suppose the infinitely wise and benevolent Father of mankind indifferent to their conduct which he continually beholds? Will not the same wisdom and goodness, which prepared the sun to enlighten and warm the world, support the practice of temperance, righteousness and mercy among men; which, to say the least of them, are as necessary to their well-being

being as the light and heat of the sun? Will he not be pleased with those among his offspring, whom he sees concurring with his designs, and promoting the common welfare; and be displeased with those who counteract him? Can he, whose perfect wisdom is attended with equal power, fail of treating his creatures, his children, agreeably to their differing moral characters; of making the good happy, in proportion to their goodness, and the vicious miserable, in proportion to their ill desert; can he be other than the moral Governor of men?

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Thus with irresistible evidence, from the universal Presence of a most perfect mind, we may prove his *moral Providence*, his love to the pious, righteous and benevolent, and his aversion to the irreligious, unjust and cruel; the certain happiness of the one, and misery of the other. And agreeable to this is the general representation given in the *holy scriptures* of the character and conduct of the Deity. *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro' through the whole earth, that he may shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright; but the wicked are an abomination in his sight.*

2 Chron.
xvi. 9.

Psalms
xi. 7.

Gen.
xviii. 25.

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should be as the wicked, that be far from God; for shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?

Eccl.
viii. 11.

Acts
xvii. 31.

4. The proofs we have of the universal Presence of God render the belief of a *final judgment* easy and reasonable. As men are naturally frail and changeable, it requires some length of time and a series of actions to determine their characters, and establish habits either of virtue or vice. It therefore appears right to the supreme wisdom, that *sentence against an evil work should not be executed immediately*; but that time should be allowed for offenders to recover themselves by repentance from vicious actions into which they have been surprized, and from bad dispositions which they have contracted; and to approve, by steadily resisting various temptations, the strength and constancy of their affection to God and goodness. God does not therefore immediately reward or punish every action and every man, but *hath appointed a day, in which he will finally judge all men with impartial righteousness according to their works*. In order to this, all the thoughts, dispositions, and actions of men, which are of a moral denomination, and which have contributed to constitute them righteous or wicked, must be taken into

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an exact account, and not one of them omitted. SERMON
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But many are ready to object, how is this possible? To which we answer—The Omnipresence of God proves that he is an infinite mind, and a constant witness to all the thoughts, words, and actions of men, and is therefore abundantly qualified to judge the world in righteousness, and to render to all according to their deserts; so as in the final retribution not to omit any one moral action, whether good or evil. God is a pure spirit, necessarily and infinitely perfect, and therefore incapable of decay as to his knowledge. 'Tis certain from fact that he knows all things, and being immutably perfect he cannot forget any. *As all things therefore are naked and open before the eyes of him to whom we are accountable; so, at the Judgment-day, the books will be opened, and all men judged by the things written in them according to their works.* That is, with as much exactness, as if God had recorded in a book all the purposes and actions of every man. Heb.
iv. 13.

Rev.
xx. 12.

5. What has been proved in relation to the Divine Omnipresence, may assist us to form right notions of the design and use of *Christ's Mediation*. Earthly sovereigns must be applied to by Mediators, because they want information of cases, characters, and

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the like; and being incapable of knowing all things themselves, they must as to many receive information from others. They are also frequently defective in goodness, and influenced by passions which render it necessary for those who would succeed with them to apply by persons whom they love, and by whose interest they may obtain, what otherwise would be denied. But God is every where, and immediately and perfectly knows all cases and characters, and even every mental prayer, and who are the proper objects of his bounty and mercy; a mediator with him cannot therefore be for information. He is also infinitely wise and benevolent, and the use of a Mediator cannot therefore be to prevail with him by his affection to the Mediator for favours, which otherwise he wanted the goodness to communicate. Nor can it farther with reason be supposed, that any Mediator could prevail with God to act inconsistently with the rules of wisdom, holiness, or goodness, by granting favours, which he saw it not best to grant.

The *design* therefore of constituting a *Mediator* between God and sinful men, was partly to maintain on their minds a conviction of the great evil of sin and wickedness; and of the sacredness of the *Divine Presence*; since as sinners he does not al-

Job xlii.
7. 8.

low them to approach him and ask the greatest favours, otherwise than through the mediation of his Son. And that the great blessings he grants them, might not be thought to proceed from an indifference to the honour and observation of his laws, but from his regard to the condescension, perfect obedience, and merit of his Son; who that he might recover men to holiness, was pleased to leave Heaven and be made flesh, that he might be a preacher and pattern of righteousness, and become obedient unto death. And favours granted, as the rewards of such consummate piety and goodness, must be powerful encouragements and obligations to conform to his instructions and example. For they manifest how pleasing such a disposition and conduct are to God; when as a token how much he approved these in his Son, he rewarded him with a power to confer such valuable favours upon us. And when farther, God did not admit his own Son to mediate successfully for sinful men, till he had thus laboured and suffered to destroy sin, and restore piety and virtue in the world; is not this an awful discovery, how much an holy God is averse to sin and wickedness? The Mediation of Christ was also intended for the encouragement of all humble penitents, who may expect

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Rom. v.

10.

viii. 32.

from the divine mercy the greatest blessings, if they comply with his gracious design; for God, *who when we were sinners and enemies gave his Son to death for us*, will he not when we are penitent and reconciled with him, give us all things? *Having therefore a great high Priest passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God*, we may come boldly unto the throne of grace, for mercy and grace to help in time of need.

Heb. iv.

14.

This may be sufficient as to the truths included in the Divine Omnipresence, or consequent from it. It remains that I close these discourses on this important subject, with some practical Reflections. And without repeating those before made, let me desire you to enter seriously into the following.

1. Hence we should learn the great folly of hypocrisy, and secret wickedness. God is *every where, and sees the heart; and he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness; and make manifest the counsels of the heart*; and he hateth, and will punish all the wicked and impenitent. What then can be more foolish, than to dissemble and be wicked, under the eye of a most holy God, *who will not be mocked; and who will judge the world in righteousness*, and expose the guilty to that infamy which

1 Cor. iv.

5.

Gal. vi.

7.

which they dread more than hell? Could SERMON
III. any pretences impose upon God, any secrecy or solitude hide from his observation, it might then be thought prudent to serve some worldly interest by dissembling in religion, or to seize some forbidden pleasure. But when we are assured that God is every where, that *there is not a thought in our hearts, or a word on our tongues, but they are known to him*; and that he is unchangeable in his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness, can any temptation prevail? How many who could not survive the shame, of having their secret guilt known to the world; yea, who would not venture on some sins they daily commit under the eye of a person of common virtue, are yet secure in their sins, though God knows and abhors them; and venture every day to commit in his view, what he hath declared he will punish!

Can any conduct be more foolish—To dread the censure and condemnation of men, yet be unconcerned, though God condemn? To fear the displeasure of the magistrate, who can inflict a comparatively light punishment; yet to dare offend to his face the supreme governor, who can destroy both body and soul in hell? As certainly as you live, God is always with you, for he constantly supports your life.

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As certainly as you think, he knows your thoughts; since it is under his direction, that ideas rise regularly to your observation; and as certainly as he knows your conduct, being most wise, righteous, and almighty, he abhors and will punish you, if you are wicked. Do christians know this, and can any continue to trifle in religion, to indulge a secret vice, or practise concealed injustice? Can any of the pleasures or profits of sin compensate for the loss of the divine favour and an eternal heaven; for the stings of a guilty conscience, for the oppressing ignominy which will attend the full discovery and condemnation of their sins at the last day, and for the torments of hell?

2. Is the Almighty *every where present*, the approver and most bountiful rewarder of goodness and integrity, how little temptation, can a pious and virtuous man have to secure any advantage, or avoid any evil by *criminal* compliances? Is honour your great concern, and are ridicule and censure not to be avoided without denying or dissembling some important truth, omitting your duty, or doing something wrong, when in company with the great and wicked? Can you seriously think of the presence of the great Jehovah, and hesitate a moment, whose censure and condemnation you

you shall incur? Will you not rather re-
joice in this opportunity of recommending
yourselves to the approbation of God?

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Who will reward this small sacrifice of your reputation with ill judging mortals by the honour of his public approbation at the judgment-day, which will draw after it even the approbation of those who now deride you, and immortal glory and blessedness. Might not a man of sense, engaged in performing some great and good action under the view and encouragement of the wisest and best of Kings, as reasonably drop it, do the contrary, and affront his sovereign; that he might avoid the hooting of some idle boys, who neither knew what was right, nor concerned themselves about it? as a good man, under the view of God, do an ill action, that he might decline the contempt of mistaken sinners?

But they threaten to deprive you of every external good, and even of life—And can this shake your integrity, if you raise your thoughts to an ever present God, *without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground*; and without whose leave they cannot lift a hand against you? Who will not suffer them to inflict any evil, unless for approving your virtue, and increasing your final happiness; and who, should he suffer them

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to deprive you of life, will do it that you may sooner *be with Jesus in Paradise*; and at the general resurrection will restore with advantage the life they took away.

Or does the securing some considerable degree of wealth or pleasure tempt you to injustice or lewdness? Can the temptation have any force, if you consider the presence of God, the director of all events; and who in a course of piety, integrity, and purity, will grant you every good or pleasure proper for you? Or can any criminal pleasure make you amends for the smart of conscious ingratitude and guilt under the eye of God, or for losing the solid satisfactions produced by a good hope of the divine approbation, and the blessedness of eternity; or even for suffering that shame and regret the penitent must feel, before he can recover peace of conscience and purity of heart? 'Tis a want of faith, or a neglect to cherish a lively conviction of the continual presence of God, that gives temptations any power over us. For certainly no proffered advantage or threatened evil could move us from our duty, while we behaved and considered ourselves surrounded with the presence of that great Being; whose favour is an almighty guard against every evil, and an assurance to the faithful

faithful of every real good for this life and for eternity.

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Finally; is God present every where, as the *moral governor* of the world, an observer of our conduct, and the friend of piety and goodness, and will he be soon the most bountiful rewarder of the pious and good? Let it be our great and constant concern *to approve ourselves unto God*. Were there any part of our lives wherein God did not observe us, and wherein virtue and piety would not recommend us to his favour, and thus promote our supreme and everlasting felicity, we might in that part be excused, if we dropt the concern of pleasing him, and neglected our duty. But since, as certainly as God is, he is ever present, and *the rewarder of them* who diligently seek him, and cheerfully imitate his beneficence, we should never drop this concern. Can any thing be of equal importance to us, with the favour of an omnipresent God, and his everlasting rewards? Should we not rejoice, that we act under his view, and may continually rise in his favour, and enlarge our interest in a blessedness consummate and everlasting?

What are the pursuits of wealth or ambition, or the most luxurious scenes of sensual indulgence; or what is their importance to our happiness, in comparison with this?

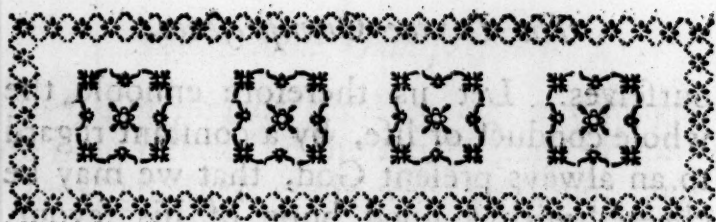
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this ? For present pleasure and advantage, they are inferior to the satisfactions of conscious goodness approved by God, and they can last but a little while. Death in a few days will put an utter end to them ; and they will be to us, for any influence on our happiness, as if they had never been. Whereas if we make it the great study and labour of life to please God, to cultivate gratitude and love to our great and constant benefactor, to regulate our passions, and discharge the duties of our stations, for the benefit of all with whom we are conversant, behaving with temperance, purity, justice, compassion, and charity ; we shall thus become every day more pleasing to God, shall secure under his favour the possession of every good, proper for a state of probation ; and at the hour of death, when every external good will fail us, when the vicious, the worldly, and profane, stript of every enjoyment, will be turned destitute and despairing into another world ; we shall have the light of God's countenance to cheer us in our passage through the vale of death, and find him our portion for ever. We shall for ever enjoy his glorious presence, and the unbounded communications of his favour, whose gracious presence we now feel, and to whose all-seeing eye we study to approve ourselves.

ourselves. Let us therefore ennoble the whole conduct of life, by a constant regard to an always present God, that we may be cheered with a good hope of his favour, amidst the uneasy events of time, and have the prospect of eternal blessedness still brightening before us, and our interest in it still enlarging; until the God with whom *we now walk by faith*, and whose presence we faintly apprehend at best, shall call us to his *immediate presence*, and give us to dwell for ever in his courts, and enjoy a felicity far above all we can now conceive; the possession of which to all the sincerely pious and good is as certain, as that *God is now with them*; whose presence *upholds all things, and fills heaven and earth*.

May he bless what has been offered to your thoughts, to make us all of this wise and happy number. Amen.



S E R M O N I V .

The Ascension of Christ credible,
and well circumstanced, and at-
tested.



ACTS i. 9—11.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly towards Heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said—Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into Heaven.

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I T is the glory of the christian religion, that it assures us of the most important truths relating to a future state, and the everlasting rewards reserved by God for the pious and obedient, by the express declarations

clarations and promises of persons who proved themselves divinely instructed; and farther renders these truths more affecting and convincing by several public facts and sensible instances. That the sincerely pious and virtuous, though they are not to expect their reward in this life; and after having often had a larger share of afflictions than others must die like them, that they shall yet be restored to life and fully rewarded, we are assured not only by the *promise* but by the *example* of *Jesus*, our divine instructor. He lived as he taught us to live, by his testimony in death confirmed his promises of a resurrection and eternal life to his faithful disciples; expired on a cross, and was laid in a grave; and then at the time appointed burst the bands of death, and showed himself alive again to those who had seen him dead, and conversed with them for forty days. And if on this evidence we believe and are sure that *Jesus* died and rose again, we may well believe and be certain, that they who *sleep in Jesus*, shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth of their graves unto the resurrection of life.

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John xiv.
2.

1 Thes.
iv. 14.
John v.
28.

Again; reason and experience convince all the considerate, that this world, though well furnished for a state of trial and discipline, hath so many defects and evils
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Rev.
vii. 17.

dispersed throughout it, as render vain the wish and hope of enjoying compleat satisfaction here. Our master therefore just before his death, comforted his disciples with this declaration, that *in Heaven, his Father's house, were many mansions*; that there God would *wipe all tears from their eyes*; that in them they should find no more death, nor pain, nor any thing that defiles; and that he would *go, and prepare a place for them, and come again and receive them to himself*; and that *where he resided, they also should be*. And that we might be certain of this, having after his resurrection fully instructed his Apostles in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, he led them out of Jerusalem to Bethany; and having there blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And his Apostles were at the same time assured by two attendant angels, that this same Jesus, whom they had seen taken up into Heaven, should in like manner, at the time appointed, come from thence, and having raised all his servants from the dead, *to meet their Lord in the air*, conduct them to Heaven, that they may *be for ever with him*.

Let me mention another instance. For our encouragement against all opposition to imitate the virtues, and obey the precepts

cepts of our divine Master, it is promised, *that the bodies which are sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption; and which are sown in dishonour, shall be raised in glory.* And this circumstance is added, that they shall be *fashioned like unto the glorious body of our Lord.* And to give more distinct apprehensions of this advantageous change, and confirm our hope, Jesus appeared unto two of his apostles, *Paul and John,* with a majesty and splendour *above the light of the sun; his head and his hair white like wool, as white as snow; his eyes as a flame of fire, his feet like unto fine brass burning in a furnace, and his countenance like the sun, shining in its strength.*

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1 Cor.
xv. 42.

Phil.
iii. 21.

Acts ix. 3.
xxvi. 13.

Rev.
i. 19.

Could the apostles, after hearing these declarations of Jesus Christ, and being witnesses to these facts, have any rational doubts remaining of the certainty and transcendant value of that immortal blessedness which our Lord promised to those who believe and obey him? Could they think any concern so important, as by an exalted piety, an active goodness, and an heavenly conversation, to secure an interest in this everlasting felicity? Could so many persons be deceived, as to what they saw and heard in open day and in repeated conversations? Or can we have any reason to suspect, that they would deceive us in accounts which are fitted to animate us to all

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piety

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piety and virtue, and in confirmation of which they gave up every worldly interest, and even their lives? And can we act a wiser part, than live as the disciples of a risen and ascended Jesus; as persons who hope, and who are assured, they shall then live with him, in the presence of God, and in the fulness of joy, for ever?

You see, Christians, what an interest we all have in this fact, the Ascension of Christ into Heaven, to which I would now direct your thoughts. An earthly kingdom is really of no value in comparison; since this is a rational and strong assurance to us of an heavenly kingdom, and a divine blessedness for eternity. May we so seriously consider it, as to be properly influenced by it!

xvi. 19.

St. *Luke*, at the close of his gospel, and in this first chapter of the *Acts*, gives us the most distinct and full account of this great event. It is also mentioned by St. *Mark*, and referred to by the other writers of the New Testament, in places too many to be cited. I would now lay before you the principal previous facts which relate to it, and render it credible; then the *fact* itself, and its *important consequences*; and then add some *observations* which may be useful for establishing our faith, raising our hopes, and animating our obedience.

I. Let

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John
i. 14.
xvi. 28.

John
xvii. 5.

Phil.
ii. 7.

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gels, cloathed with bodies spiritual, glorious and immortal, purified from all inclinations to animal and sinful pleasures, and find every thing favourable to their improvement in piety, goodness, and happiness, for eternity.

His authority to make *these exceeding great and precious promises* to the sinful children of men, was evidenced by a variety of great, public, and beneficent *miracles*; which not only proved his commission from God, but his power to rectify the disorders of the human body and mind, and his command over death, and therefore his power to qualify men for a heavenly life. He lived also as he taught us to live; eminent for a rational and sublime devotion, a generous beneficence, and tender compassion; for an integrity superior to every temptation, and a moderation to the pleasures of an animal body and a perishing world, worthy a Person who was not of this world, and who was soon to return to God, and to the Heaven whence he descended. His doctrine and his life were so contrary to the corrupt tempers and principles of the rulers of his nation, that, regardless of all the proofs he gave of a divine character and commission, they imprisoned, condemned, and crucified him. He foresaw and foretold his death, yet came up to *Jerusalem*, that he might endure

ture it, in attestation to the noble truths he had taught. And just before his death, to comfort his disciples, he acquainted them, that it was expedient for them and for mankind that he should die, to receive from the Father, as his reward, the grant of a full remission for the penitent believer and of eternal life—that he would rise from the dead on the third day, and ascend to his Father; and that his going away was expedient for them, because on his return to Heaven, he would *send down the Holy Spirit*, who would enable them to preach and spread his religion, confirming it every where by miracles, and recommending it by their practice. SERMON
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In pursuance of these declarations, after being crucified, dead, and buried, he rose on the third day from the dead, and appeared often to his apostles and other disciples, *to whom he shewed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* At the conclusion of these days, when he had given them full satisfaction, as to his resurrection, and the necessary instructions for propagating his religion, and administering the affairs of his kingdom, he led them out of *Jerusalem* to a part of the mount of olives adjoining to *Bethany*. Here they might undisturbed be spectators of his as-

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cent into Heaven. And thus the place wherein they had been witnesses to his agony and to his intire submission, was also dignified with the brightest token of his Father's approbation, his receiving him into Heaven.

Here he checked their curiosity, as to the time wherein he would *restore the kingdom to Israel*, and convert the whole nation, and thus qualify them to enjoy the great blessings promised to *Israel* under the Messiah. This event, after seventeen hundred years, not being yet accomplished, it was evidently unfit for them to know the season appointed for it, least it should have discouraged their endeavours to convert their countrymen, to know that the time for the full harvest would be so long delayed. And then Jesus said unto them. *Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up.* And they appearing as his witnesses immediately at *Jerusalem*, where he had been crucified, and his enemies still retained their authority, and gaining many myriads there to the belief of his resurrection and Messiah-ship in the face of danger, sufferings and death, gave to all following ages

Acts
xxi. 20.

fatis-

satisfactory assurance of the truth of their testimony, namely, that Jesus really rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven; and by pouring out the Holy Spirit, enabled them to confirm their testimony; and by the power given him in Heaven and in Earth, restrained and defeated the rage of his and their enemies.

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Thus we are come to the *time* and *place* of our Lord's Ascension. And, upon a review of what preceded, must we not own it to have been worthy the divine wisdom and goodness, thus to close the ministry of his Son upon Earth, and his generous labours to prepare men for Heaven? Who that was acquainted with the original excellence of Jesus, as the only begotten of the Father, could think this our world, abounding in folly, vice, and wretchedness, proper for his continual abode, and not approve his return to his native Heaven? Who that considers the influence, which the firm hope of following him thither must have, to determine men to imitate his virtues and obey his laws, but sees the great wisdom and kindness of God, in thus compleating our assurance of ascending to those mansions which he is gone to prepare? And who that considers the condescending friendship of the Redeemer, his entire submission and devotedness to God, his generous and unwearied labours for our

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salvation, labours so ill requited; his deep humiliation and obedience, even unto the death of the cross; but must think such perfect merit, thus ill treated by a prejudiced and wicked race of men, worthy of being thus honourably distinguished by God, the supreme Judge and Rewarder; worthy of an exaltation to the divine Presence, and of receiving the homage of angels, and the government of the race which he redeemed, in order to his training all the well-disposed amongst them to the perfection of their nature, the society of angels, and the joys of his everlasting kingdom?

Having seen the reception of Christ Jesus into Heaven to be a fact credible and worthy of God, Let us

II. Take a distinct view of this great event, as represented by Saint *Luke*.

We are then to imagine the Son of God and the best of men to have been attended, not only by the *eleven apostles*, but by others of his disciples, probably by the one hundred and twenty, mentioned v. 15; out of whom *Matthias* was chosen to be the twelfth apostle. For of these it is said, by St. *Peter*, v. 21, 22; *they have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us; begining from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us.* With these,
who

who had been the most intimate witnesses of his life and doctrine, of his ignominious death and glorious resurrection, Jesus came to a retired part of the *Mount of Olives* near *Jerusalem*, from whence he was to *ascend to his Father and God*. His disciples had been taught, that the supreme Lord of all, though he *fills Heaven and Earth* with his essential Presence, had distinguished one part of the creation, called the *Heaven of Heavens*, with the marks of his *peculiar* Presence. A majestic *throne*, surrounded with *light*, to mortals *inaccessible, and full of glory*, before which *ten thousand times ten thousand angels* attended, were informed of his pleasure, celebrated his praises, *obeyed his commandments*, *hearkening to the voice of his word*, and received assurances of his favour; *where is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for ever*. From this blessed place, from his *Father's house*, they knew their divine Master had come into this world; and thither they now expected to see him return, to be invested with the highest authority and bliss, the proper reward for having *glorified his Father upon Earth*. What strong emotions of love and sorrow, of hope and joy, and anxious expectation must have filled their bosoms while they viewed him, whose excellence and worth they knew and loved more than ever, and feared that every view

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John
xx. 17.

1 Kings
viii. 27.

Psalms
ciii. 19.

1 Tim.
vi. 15.

Dan.
vii. 9.

Psalms
xvii. 11.

John
xvii. 4.

of

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of him would be the last! How should they be able to live and behold no more his divine Person, and hear no more his heavenly words, which had often made their hearts burn within them, and animated them to every thing great and good! And how, left by him, could they face the rage of a powerful and cruel priesthood, and a corrupt, prejudiced, and persecuting world! To Jesus, to encourage them against such apprehensions, having promised to send them the Holy Spirit, after a pause, which intimated he was about to leave them, *lifted up his hands, and blessed them*; and while they with eager attention received the blessing, *he was parted from them*. And with the utmost propriety was the life of Jesus upon Earth *closed with blessings* to his attendants. He came down from Heaven to *bless us, by turning every one of us from our iniquities*; and that *whoever would believe in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life*. He went about doing good, *preaching peace to the humble and broken in heart*; and *healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people*. Just before his death, he said to his apostles, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid. In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you; and I will*

A 7s
iii. 76.John
iii. 16.A 6s
x. 36.John xiv.
1, 27.

I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may also be. Yea, even in death, he prayed for his murderers, saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do; and assured an humble and believing penitent, that he should be with him in Paradise. And after his resurrection, such was his goodness and compassion, he ordered that the gospel of repentance and remission of sins should be first preached to those who had crucified him. How could such goodness take leave of special friends but with repeated blessings? Holy Father, keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me. Keep them from the evil of the world, and sanctify them through thy truth. May they be one in us; and may the love, wherewith thou hast loved me, be in them, and I in them. All power is given to me in Heaven and in Earth; and lo, I am with you always, by my spirit and favour, to the end of the world. I will come again, and receive you to myself, and you shall behold my glory. To this effect the brightest Image of his Father's goodness blest his disciples, as he was parted from them.

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IV.

Luke
xxiii.
34, 43.

xxiv. 47.

John
xvii. 11.

When *Elijah* was taken up to Heaven, *Elisha* was the only witness of his translation; and he was obliged to be very watchful, that he might see him taken up. And he had only, on this condition, a doubtful promise

2 Kings
ii.

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IV.

promise of his having a larger share of his Master's spirit than any other of the prophets. But the Son of God had more than a *hundred witnesses* of his *gradual ascent* into Heaven, to whom he gave express and repeated assurances that they should *receive power from on high*; that the Holy Spirit should descend upon them, as their guide into all necessary truth, and as their advocate to plead their cause against a prejudiced and persecuting world.

Acts i. 8.

John

xvi. 7.

John

xvii. 20,

24.

xiv. 2.

Elijah when taken up gave *Elisha* no assurance that he should be received in due time to Heaven; but Christ Jesus assured his apostles, and by them all who should believe in him, through their word, that *they should be with him and behold his glory. That he was going before to prepare a place for them; and would come again and receive them to himself.* Christians, may we not with good reason *glory in Christ* our Master? Who would not obey such an instructor, and follow such a guide; who blesses us in life and death, and at his going up to Heaven, and is there employed in preparing everlasting blessedness for us, and in preparing us to enjoy it?

Let Christians learn from their Master to close a pious, edifying, and benevolent life with instructions, blessings, and encouragements to those who shall attend their death; raising the affections and hopes

hopes of surviving friends to that Heaven into which they are entering before them. For this end they must be careful, by a life exemplarily pious and beneficent, to prepare themselves for a death full of hope and attraction to those whom they leave behind them. And let us ever remember, such a life is the only preparation for such a death.

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To proceed with our Evangelist's relation. *While they beheld, he was taken up; and they looked stedfastly towards Heaven, when the cloud received him,* and bore him upward. They were not only present when he was taken up, but saw him gradually ascending. Jesus, by frequent visits and long conversations, had removed from the disciples the terror occasioned by the first appearance of a Person returned from the dead; and they were thus qualified fully to satisfy themselves, by calm observation, that it was indeed their late crucified Master returned to life, and of giving entire satisfaction to others. And the assurance which Jesus qualified them to enjoy of his being risen, he thus prepared them to receive themselves, and communicate to us, of his *Ascension* into Heaven. What an abundant confirmation this of the divine authority of Jesus, and the truth of his religion! He not only, in the hearing of his apostles, and of great multitudes, taught
the

SERMON
IV.

the *most important* truths, and confirmed them by working great and beneficent *miracles* before their eyes, and after exhibiting a *consummate example* of a divine life, expired on a cross, in attestation of the doctrines he had taught ; but was *seen alive again*, and conversed with, by more than *five hundred* ; and in the *sight* of more than a *hundred* of his intimate acquaintance and disciples ascended towards Heaven. Can we reasonably doubt that God sent this Jesus to promise us that Heaven for which the practice of his religion prepares us ? Are we not, on the best reasons, assured that if we obey him, we shall be, according to his repeated promises, received into that Heaven, to which so many of his disciples saw him ascend, as our forerunner ?

Let us attend to another circumstance. *He was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.* A bright cloud of glory attended by *angels*, was the usual token of the *special Presence* of God, and is in scripture styled the *chariot* of the Almighty. This waited to bear the Son of God to Heaven. The *cloud* is mentioned in the text, and the attendance of angels in the verse following. *Two* of them in glittering robes address the disciples, *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven, &c.* St. Luke indeed, because they appeared in a human form, calls them *two men*

men in white apparel; but that he intended two angels, is plain from his relation of the resurrection, wherein the persons, in one part, stiled *two men in shining garments*, are, in another, declared to be *angels*. See also *Acts* x. 3, 30. These were probably the same angels who had declared his resurrection to the women. *Peter, James, and John* had seen Jesus at his *transfiguration* taken up into the cloud, and *Moses and Elias* carried back in it to Heaven. They would therefore, with the other disciples, be full of attention and anxious expectation when the cloud of glory appeared with the attendant angels. But who can imagine what they felt, when they saw Jesus seated in it, and gradually rising towards Heaven, smiling and pronouncing blessings on them, and in every look saying, *Fear not—I go to prepare a place for you; and the power given to me in Heaven and in Earth shall be your protection*, until it raise you to my Father's courts! How did they wish to follow, as they saw their loved and glorious Lord ascending! How follow him with their hearts and eyes, while any glimpse of his triumphal ascension could be discerned! No wonder, they with transport continued to look towards Heaven, when he was ascended above their view, and needed to be admonished of returning to the duties of their office, spreading

Luke
xxiv. 4,
23.

SERMON
IV.

ing the religion and kingdom of their Lord, in hope of being also raised to that Heaven to which he was now gone.

As he was ascending, the *body* of our Lord was *changed*, as *Elijah's* probably was when he was taken up, from an *animal* into a *spiritual, glorious, and incorruptible* body, fit to reside in Heaven. That after his resurrection, his body was still an animal one, appeared from his *eating and drinking*, from his subjecting it to be *handled*, and declaring that it was *flesh and bones*. This was necessary, that the disciples might be convinced, that the *same Jesus* who had been crucified, was raised again to life. But, *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. As Jesus ascended, it was therefore changed into a spiritual body, fit to enjoy the glory and bliss of the Heaven he entered.

1 Cor.
xv. 50.

And this the last circumstance of our Lord's ascension, when parted from them, *he was carried up into Heaven. He was received up into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*. Heaven is the court of God, and the seat of majesty, glory, and felicity; for there *dwells the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*. To sit in Heaven, *at the right hand of God*, denotes by an easy figure being next to the most high God and Father in majesty, authority, and blessedness. It is
having

having all things put under his feet ; angels, principalities, and powers being made subject to him, and his becoming thus head over all things to his body the church. Now was the Redeemer again glorified with that glory, which he had with the Father before the world was ; and this added, as his reward, to be set far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named ; not only in this world, but in that which is to come—He only being excepted who did put all things under him. The disciples, witnesses to his Ascension, could not indeed behold his Exaltation in Heaven, though Stephen and Paul afterwards beheld it ; the one in vision and the other really ; and Paul was struck to the Earth, blinded and overpowered by the sight. Yet had the apostles and other disciples full assurance that Jesus was thus exalted, by his sending down the Holy Spirit upon them, according to his promise. And Peter thus reasoned with the Jews. Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Spirit, he hath poured out this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the Heavens ; but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand.

SERMON
IV.

John
xvii. 5.

Eph.
i. 20.

I Cor.
xv.

Acts
ii. 33.

It is then certain, that Jesus not only left our world, but was received up into Heaven, and admitted to the glorious Presence

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of

SERMON
IV.

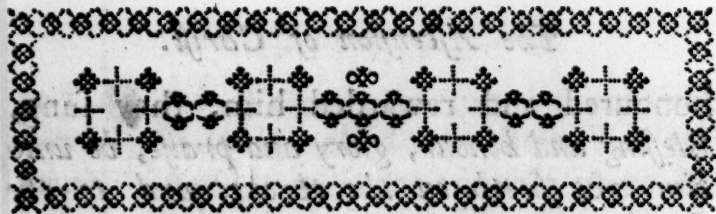
Heb.
ii. 9.

of God, his Father; having *led captivity captive*, and triumphed over satan, sin, and death. And how inconceivably great his happiness, in his return to Heaven, and receiving the full approbation of his Father, for having *glorified him on Earth, and finished the work which he had given him to do!* How great the joy and triumph of those pious and benevolent spirits, the angels, on his return to Heaven, no more to be ill treated and suffer; but to be happy to the height of his merit, and to the extent of his Father's goodness and power! They had been admiring witnesses of his condescending goodness and filial piety, *in being made lower than they*, by stooping to endure the labours, wants, and sufferings of mortal men; they had with pleasure guarded his infancy, and ministered to him in the desert; with both a pleasing and painful admiration they had beheld him deserving the best treatment from men, yet with patient resignation enduring the worst; they comforted him in his agony, watched his sepulchre, and with triumph declared his return to life—but who can conceive their joy, when they beheld his divine benevolence rewarded at the right hand of the Father, with a glory and felicity divine? When triumphing in his exaltation, majesty and bliss, and adoring the wisdom and goodness of his almighty Father, who thus honoured

honoured and rewarded him, they sung, *Blessing and honour, glory and praise, be unto him who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive glory and honour, and power and blessing.* Let us, Christians, who are more interested in his Exaltation, with a gratitude and devotion like theirs, repeat the praise—*Glory to God in the highest, for verily our God is love. And worthy indeed is the Lamb who was slain, to receive salvation, glory, power, and blessing, for he was slain, and hath redeemed us unto God, by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation; that we might be kings and priests unto God, and reign with him for ever and ever. Amen. Halleluiah!*

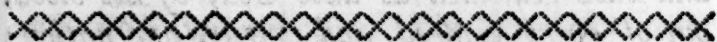
SERMON
IV.

III. We are next to enquire into the principal purposes for which Jesus was thus exalted, and the beneficial consequences of his Ascension; but of these in the next Discourse.



S E R M O N V.

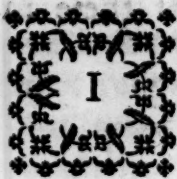
The great Purposes of our Saviour's
Ascension and Exaltation.



ACTS i. 9—II.

*And when he had spoken these things, while
they beheld, he was taken up, &c.*

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IN a preceding Discourse I shewed the credibility of this important fact, the direct evidence we have for it, and the main circumstances attending it. I am now

III. To set before you the principal Purposes for which Jesus was thus exalted, and the beneficial consequences of his Ascension. Revelation informs us of these *four* principal Purposes, for which the Son of God was rewarded, with an Exaltation

to

to the right hand of the Father in Heaven SERMON V.
 —that he might *pour out the Holy Spirit* on his apostles and disciples—that he might *appear in the presence of God*, as our high-priest and intercessor—that he might be *head over all things to his body the church*—and might come from thence in power and great glory, to raise all the dead, and judge the world in righteousness. And these deserve our distinct consideration.

1. Christ Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God in Heaven, that he might send down the Holy Spirit on his apostles and disciples. St. John informs us, that the Holy Spirit was not given before, because Jesus was not yet glorified. And our Lord, to comfort his apostles on his departure, told them, *it was expedient for them that he should go away; for if he went not, the Comforter would not come; but if he went to Heaven, he would send him.* This miraculous effusion of the Spirit was not only necessary, for qualifying the apostles and first disciples to spread and confirm the religion of Jesus every where; but his receiving the disposal of the Spirit, being the reward of his obedience unto death, and intended for an evidence to all, that he was raised to the right hand of God in Heaven; it was highly proper that he should be taken up to that Heaven, where the Holy Spirit usually resided; that his descent upon the

John
vii. 39.

Gal.
iii. 13.

Phil.
ii. 2.

SERMON
V.

apostles might be a demonstration to all of the Exaltation of Christ. *And all the House of Israel might by this better know,* that he was received to the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens, than if they had been favoured with a transient view of his ascending through the air towards Heaven.

The disposal of the Spirit was by the *Jews* believed to belong to the Most High; when therefore, according to the promise of Christ, he descended upon his disciples, to assist them in promoting his kingdom, and manifested his residence with them by such great and lasting effects; it was a full assurance to them all, *that God had made that Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ.* Since he had given him to exercise one of the highest acts of authority, in the kingdom of Heaven. And I appeal to the reason of every impartial person, whether it be possible for one who believes, that the Holy Spirit, with his gifts of languages and miracles, thus descended on the disciples of Christ *according to his promise,* to doubt whether the most high God commissioned him, raised him from the dead, and received him to his right hand? And to all who seriously consider this certain and allowed fact, that the apostles, in themselves mean, timorous, and unlearned, pretending to these gifts, preached the doctrine of a risen and ascended Messiah in *Jerusalem,*

John
xvi. 7.

Acts
i. 4, 5.

Jerusalem, to the faces of the high-priests and governors who had crucified him, within a few weeks after his death; supported their cause, and converted thousands, on the credit of these miraculous gifts—to all who seriously consider these facts, I appeal, whether it was possible for the apostles to have effected this, had not the truth of their claim been evident and undeniable. And consequently whether we have not the best reasons for believing, that the same Jesus, whom the high-priests crucified, was by God raised from the dead, and made Lord of all.

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V.

Acts
ii. 36.

2. Jesus ascended into Heaven, that he might appear in the presence of God as our advocate and intercessor. As a merciful God intended, that sinful men should regard his accepting their repentance and defective obedience, to full remission and eternal life, not only as an effect of his abounding mercy, but as a reward also to his Son for what he did, and taught and suffered, to reconcile men to God, and form them for Heaven; he appointed that we should pray for the blessings of pardon and eternal life in his name; and should regard him, as our successful mediator, in virtue of his obedience unto death. Christ therefore, says the apostle, entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true, but into Heaven itself; to appear in

Rom.
v. 12.

John
xvi. 23.

1 Tim.
ii. 5, 6.

Heb.
ix. 24.

SERMON
V.

the presence of God for us. That is, as the high-priest's entrance into the most holy place, on the day of atonement, and there presenting the blood of the sacrifices for sin, was an assurance to the people of God's forgiving them those sins, for which they had humbled themselves and repented, and for which those sacrifices were appointed to be an atonement; it was also designed to typify the far more valuable sacrifice of the death of Christ, and his entering into the divine presence in Heaven. And there *he appears for us* in his glorified body, still bearing upon it the marks of his obedience and death, *as a Lamb that had been slain.*

Rev. v. 6.

Heb.
iv. 14.

What an encouragement this to the humble and penitent, to *come boldly unto the throne of grace, for obtaining mercy, and grace to help in time of need; that we have a great high-priest passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God!* If we are sincerely penitent and obedient, the consciousness of many sins and defects should not dishearten us; since to raise such frail imperfect creatures to the largest expectations from his goodness, our merciful God appointed for us an high-priest, who having been *partaker of flesh and blood, can be touched with a sense of our infirmities, and who was in all points tempted like as we are.* As therefore the sacredness of the divine majesty, and the honour of the divine government, are maintained,

Heb.
ii. 17.
iv. 15.

maintained, by our being directed to re-
 gard such great favours and privileges
 granted to sinful creatures, by the good-
 ness of their offended Sovereign; as a re-
 ward also of the astonishing condescension
 of the Redeemer, and the labours and suf-
 ferings he went through, for the destruc-
 tion of sin, and for restoring piety and vir-
 tue amongst men; so the suspicions and
 fears, natural to frail offending creatures,
 have thus a proper relief. We should
 therefore be constant and fervent in our
 addresses to the *throne of grace*, and cheerful
 and persevering in our obedience, being
 assured that God, who was so kind as to
 give his Son, and *reconcile us to himself by*
his death, will with him give all things to
 the penitent and obedient. And since we
 have also such a friend in Heaven, who
 having loved us to the death, we may be
 assured is as willing, as he is able, *to save*
for ever, all who come unto God by him; see-
ing he ever liveth to make intercession for
them. What an excellence this in the gos-
 pel of Christ, that it thus provides for the
 consolation of all the serious, humble, and
 penitent, who most need encouragement,
 and who alone deserve it!

SERMON
V.

Rom.
v. 8.
viii. 32.

Heb.
vii. 25.

3. Jesus ascended into Heaven, that he
 might receive the government of the world,
 which he had redeemed; and having all
 power committed to him in Heaven and in
 Earth,

SERMON

V.

Earth, be made head over all things to his body the church. This the apostle declares to the *Epheſians*, c. i. 20.—to have been one great end of his Exaltation to Heaven; where our Lord ſays, *all power was given unto him.* The *angels*, who are employed by God as miniſters of his moral providence and government, reſide in Heaven before the divine preſence, and there attend his commands. As Chriſt therefore was *exalted above all principalities and powers*, and had the *angels* of God *made ſubject to him*, it was proper that he ſhould be received to Heaven where they reſide, that he might thence ſend them *to be miniſtering ſpirits to the heirs of ſalvation.* And our Lord ſoon gave proofs of his being thus exalted. He ſent an angel to open the priſon doors, and reſeal the apoſtles, when the high-prieſt and council had confined them. At another time, by an angel, he directed *Philip* to meet the eunuch of the queen of *Ethiopia*, for converting him to the chriſtian faith; and then tranſported him to *Azotus*, that he might there convert many others. By the miniſtry of an angel, our Lord alſo delivered *Peter*, when cloſe ſhut up and ſtrongly guarded, and deſtined to be brought forth on the morrow for execution. By beings of the ſame order he encouraged and delivered his apoſtle *Paul*; and revealed to St. *John* the counſels

Heb.
i. 14.Acts
v. 19.

viii. 26.

xii. 6.

xxvii. 23.

Rev. i. 1.

fels of God, relating to his church, during many succeeding ages, for supporting the faithful through all the years of persecution appointed for them. And it is reasonable to believe, that as the government of the world and of the church is committed to the Son of God until the consummation of all things, so he *really*, though not *visibly*, administers it by the angels, whose influence on the minds of good and bad men may bring about every event to be desired, either restraining, humbling, and reclaiming the bad, or protecting, supplying, and encouraging the good. Nor is it improbable, that when the government of the world and the church requires changes to be made, in the direction and influence of natural causes, as of the earth, the air, the winds, or the seas, for effecting purposes of mercy or justice, that the angels, under the direction of our Lord, may effect these changes. And this, which is not in itself *improbable*, the revelations made to St. *John* represent as *fact*.

Let us therefore continue cheerful and faithful in our allegiance to the Redeemer, and adherence to his truths and his cause, however despised or ill treated by the world; assured that Jesus our Lord is at the head of affairs, and directs all events, for the real happiness, and final glory and perfection of his faithful servants. That
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V.

he will, in the best manner, protect, supply, and dispose of them, during their state of trial; and at the proper season make his cause, his truth, and his kingdom to prevail every where. And that in the mean time he will make all, that we honestly and faithfully do and suffer for his cause, to prove for its advancement in that way which he sees to be best; and certainly and gloriously to serve our perfection and blessedness for eternity, in that Heaven where he now resides, and from whence he will come, at the appointed period, to raise all the dead, and judge the world. This leads our thoughts to the last purpose of our Lord's Exaltation.

4. He was received into Heaven, that he might *come from thence in power and great glory; to raise all the dead, and judge the world in righteousness; and render glory, honour, and immortality, unto all who have sought these by a patient continuance in well doing.* The final perfection and felicity of all his rational creatures, who, at the close of their state of trial, shall be found fit to be made happy, is the great end of God's moral government; and the raising his subjects to this perfection, is the noblest, and to so benevolent a Sovereign, the most pleasing, act of his administration. The Son of God therefore, who having laboured, and suffered, and died for effect-
ing

ing our salvation from sin and death, was rewarded with the government of the world, that he might form his subjects for immortal perfection; and who residing in Heaven, *prepares a place* there for his faithful servants, and so administers the affairs of the world, and the church, as may bring the most unto glory—This Jesus is properly rewarded with a power to raise all the dead, and with an authority to judge the whole world, and appoint to his servants an heavenly and everlasting kingdom. And he alone, by the excellence and perfection of his nature, as *peculiarly the Son* of God, is qualified to administer this part of his Father's government.

SERMON
V.

John
i. 14.

It is agreeable to the divine wisdom and benevolence, that this world, as a scene of trial for mankind, shall continue for thousands of years; that his goodness may be glorified in the full and everlasting blessedness of *countless millions*; and that the satisfaction and glory of his Son may be the highest conceivable, in completing a design immensely beneficent. In the highest Heavens, where the throne of the divine majesty, and the seat of universal government are fixed, the Son of God properly resides, as his vicegerent to administer affairs, as long as this mixed state of trial and discipline shall continue. And from thence the Instructor, the Lawgiver, the Friend,

Rom.
viii. 32.

Rev.
vii. 9.

SERMON

V.

Matt.

xxv. 31.

Friend, and Saviour of mankind, will, at the time appointed by the divine wisdom, descend *in his own glory, in the glory of his Father, and with all his holy angels*, to raise all the dead, and close this state of trial with a righteous and equitable distribution of rewards and punishments. He shall come in the clouds of Heaven, in power and great glory, *in like manner*; said the angels attending his Ascension, *as his disciples had seen him go up into Heaven*.

Acts

ix. 3.

xxvi. 13.

How grand and awful will be this appearance of our Lord! When he appeared to humble and restrain a single persecutor Saul, the splendor of his appearance was *above the light of the sun*, and his voice *like thunder* strook the offender to the earth.

Rev.

xx. 13.

Who of us then can imagine the grandeur of his coming, when he shall descend with the majesty of a God, to judge all the millions of millions who have inhabited this earth; or who can conceive or bear the awful sound, when he shall say, *Awake ye dead, and come unto judgment*; and be heard and obeyed throughout the earth, the seas, and the invisible world! An event of which *God hath given assurance to all by raising Jesus from the dead*.

Acts

xvii. 31.

An event as certain to us, as these well attested facts, his *conversing forty days with his apostles and disciples after he rose from the dead, being in their sight received up into Heaven*, and from

thence

thence *sending to them the Holy Spirit* SERMON
V.
with his miraculous powers and gifts,
and thus qualifying them abundantly to
confirm his religion, and spread it through
the world.

What have we then, Christians, that
greatly concerns us, but seriously to study
and faithfully obey the gospel and precepts
of our Lord, by which we must finally be
judged; steadily rejecting the maxims, cus-
toms, and examples of the world, when-
ever they would incline us to practices
which this gospel condemns, and which
will expose us to the condemnation of the
Great Judge? What have we to do, but
cheerfully and constantly to cultivate that
spirit of devotion, that supreme regard and
intire subjection and resignation to God,
and that faithful obedience and zealous
imitation of the Redeemer, that integrity,
benevolence, purity, and charity of heart
and life; which will qualify us to receive
the public approbation of our Judge; and
when all the sensual, profane, unrighteous,
wicked, and unmerciful are cast into the
ruins of a burning world, to attend the
triumphant return of the Son of God into
Heaven, and to be *for ever with the Lord*; 1 Thess.
iv. 17.
where knowledge, goodness, friendship,
devotion, and happiness will continually
improve for ever.

This

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V.

This subject offers to our minds a variety of important reflections; let me obtain your attention to the following.

1. Did our Lord ascend thus visibly and gloriously into Heaven; how intirely does this remove from his religion the scandal of the cross; and how well founded is our faith in a crucified, since we can add, a risen and ascended Saviour and Sovereign? The receiving ill treatment from prejudiced and vicious men is no proof of ill desert; since the best men have, in all ages, been thus treated. But if this usage be borne with calm resignation and trust in God, with inviolate integrity, and patient meekness and goodness, it approves and heightens the merit of the sufferer, and renders him more worthy our regard. And thus Jesus Christ bore his sufferings. Yet when a Person comes from Heaven as a divine messenger, as the *Son of God*, and encourages our stedfast adherence to religion and virtue, by assuring us that these, though ill treated and persecuted to the death here, shall be rewarded by him, with a resurrection of their votaries to a better life—had this Person continued himself under the power of death, it might have made our hopes, of being raised and rewarded by him, ill grounded; but when this Person, after suffering nobly, and expiring on a cross, for our satisfaction that death

death cannot cut off our reward, returned to life, at the appointed time, with his late mangled body compleatly repaired, and then visibly and triumphantly ascended into the promised Heaven; his *death*, instead of a reproach, is an honour to him, and instead of being a rational objection, is a strong confirmation of our faith in his divine authority and power.

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V.

His attesting his divine mission and great promises by a voluntary death, is a full proof of his integrity and veracity. And his dying and rising again, is just the satisfaction which our timorous and suspicious minds want, that we shall not perish in death, but, if we persevere in piety and virtue, shall triumph over death, and possess immortal life and felicity, like that to which our great Prophet and Leader hath risen and ascended. Philosophical proofs of the soul's immortality and a future state, however conclusive, are yet too fine for the perception of the generality. But a person least accustomed to close thinking may clearly discern, and firmly believe, that one, who in the name of God promised a resurrection and a blessed immortality in Heaven to the pious and good, and who, after dying in confirmation of these noble truths, was raised from the dead, and in open day, before many witnesses, received in glory to the promised Heaven; was certainly com-

H missioned

SERMON
V.

Rom.
viii. 17.

missioned by God to promise this resurrection to immortal blessedness. And that these events are therefore as certain, as the power, goodness, and faithfulness of God; and as reasonably believed by us, as the Ascension of Jesus in open day to Heaven was by his disciples, who looked on as he ascended, were assured by angels that he entered Heaven, and were afterward made absolutely certain of it by the descent of the holy Spirit from Heaven upon them. Let us therefore glory in a crucified, since on such evidence we can add, a risen and ascended Saviour, and adhere to his religion even unto death; knowing that should we suffer and die like him and for him, we shall also rise and reign with him in that Heaven where he is now *preparing mansions* for his faithful disciples.

2. Is Christ our Master and Head ascended into Heaven? Hence we may learn where we are to seek and *find our happiness*. Some years experience of this world, if we reflected upon it, would convince us, that though it be well adapted to a state of trial, it is yet subject to so many evils and uncertainties, as will not allow us the rational hope of enjoying in it a great or lasting happiness. A conviction which our own frailties, wants, and disorders, mental and bodily, and our mortality, and the follies, vices, diseases, and deaths of those with whom

whom we are connected, would, if we reflected, raise to a full demonstration. But if solid and lasting happiness cannot be attained here, is it to be found elsewhere, and in a degree equal to the large capacities and desires of our minds? It is—and we are greatly indebted to the Son of God, who, without subjecting us to the necessity and misery of spending a considerable part of life in an unsuccessful search, gives, on our setting out in life, the knowledge of this world's vanity to all who regard his instructions and example; and who adds to it the reviving assurance, that the happiness which we cannot find on Earth may yet be secured while we are here, and shall then be enjoyed for ever in Heaven.

He taught his disciples, that as he himself was not of this world, neither were they, nor to expect their happiness in it, but in the Heaven whence he came down, and whither he was soon to return; and where are fulness of joy and pleasures for ever. Where immortal minds, united to spiritual and incorruptible bodies, should enjoy the pleasures of angels, the pleasures of knowledge, goodness, friendship, and devotion, improving to eternity in the presence of God and the Redeemer, everlasting strangers to sickness, pain, folly, sin, and death. This is happiness indeed worth seeking; divine in its nature, sure in pos-

The Ascension of Christ.

SERMON
V.

session, and everlasting. This the instructions and example of our Master teach us to secure by cultivating a rational, habitual, and exalted devotion, a generous, tender, and compassionate benevolence, an integrity superior to the smiles or frowns of the world, and a moderation to the pleasures of sense and the animal life; with a preference of mental satisfactions becoming beings who are soon to drop the animal part for ever, and to be happy in spiritual and divine exercises and enjoyments. How noble is this hope! The joys of angels and of Heaven for eternity, and certain to all who conform to the precepts and virtues of the Redeemer, as his Resurrection and Ascension!

Who of you, Sirs, in your most flattering schemes for a worldly felicity, can please himself with the prospect of one, of a thousandth part the value and certainty? Let us all then *as risen with Christ seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. And set our affections on things above, and not on things on the Earth.* And then, as certainly as he rose and ascended into Heaven, *when Christ our life appears, we also shall appear with him in glory.* For from his throne in Heaven he thus invites us, *be faithful to the death, and I will give you the crown of life. And to him that overcometh will I grant*

Rev.
iii. 21.

grant to sit with me on my throne, as I overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne.

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V.

3. What strong consolation under the troubles of life, and encouragement against all the difficulties attending the practice of our duty, may we derive from the assumption of our Saviour and Lord into Heaven.

Does the little success of his *gospel*, and the small number of his genuine disciples, when compared with the votaries of idolatry, superstition, imposture, and vice, deeply affect us; and are we fearful what may become of the interest of genuine christianity? Let us reflect, that the Son

of God, to whom this cause was dearer than life, hath *all power committed to him in Heaven and Earth*; and will certainly in the best time and manner cause it to triumph.

And that having from his throne in Heaven revealed to his apostle *John* the long persecutions and oppressions to which his faithful servants would be subject, he also promised a time, which cannot now be very distant, when *Satan should be chained up, and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ; who shall reign for ever.*

And as we have seen the afflictive part of his predictions made good, why should we doubt that he will gloriously accomplish the other in a near period? Let us there-

Matt.
xxviii.
18.

Rev.
xx. 1.

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V.

fore cheerfully sow those seeds of truth, piety, and goodness, which we are assured shall rise and spread over the world, and produce the fruits of immortal honour and felicity.

If. liii.

Heb.
ii. 10.

Have any of us a large share of afflictions? Let us consider that our ascended Lord, who now enjoys most abundantly the glories and felicities of an eternal Heaven, was once a *man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*; and made perfect by sufferings. And if like him, amidst afflictions, we evidence and improve a pious, resigned, meek, gentle, cheerful, and heavenly disposition; having been followers of him in his humiliation, we shall also follow him to that Heaven into which he ascended; and find our crown the brighter, and our share of the heavenly felicity the larger, for our improvements amidst this discipline. *These light afflictions which are but for a moment, for so they will appear to those who look seriously to things unseen and eternal, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

2 Cor.
iv. 17.

Or do we find it difficult to maintain a serious piety, a steady virtue and goodness, and a noble indifference to the world, in opposition to prevailing irreligion, sensuality, and trifling? *Let us look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith;*

or

or the Person who prescribed a life of faith and will reward it; *who for the joy set before him endured the cross and despised the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* And as at the end of this world we would ascend with him into Heaven, and be *for ever with the Lord*, when the irreligious and wicked shall be *punished with everlasting destruction from his presence*, let us now be cheerful and resolute *followers of the Lamb*. For can we think it hard, that we must *patiently continue in well doing* unto the end of a short life, when the reward will be *glory, honour, and immortality*, certain as the Resurrection and Ascension of the crucified Jesus.

SERMON

V.

Heb.

xii. 2.

2 Theff.

i. 9.

Rom.

ii. 7.

Finally; how certain to us does the Ascension of Christ into Heaven render his second coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory, to raise all the dead, judge the world in righteousness, and render unto all according to their works! The angels, attendants on his Ascension, assured the apostles, and other disciples, who beheld it—that this same Jesus should so come from Heaven, i. e. visibly on a bright cloud attended by angels, as they had seen him go up into Heaven. And of this God has given assurance unto all men by raising him from the dead, and receiving him to his own right hand in heavenly places; in consequence of

SERMON
V.

Matt.
xxv. 31.

John
v. 28.

Rev.
xx. 11.

his claiming a commission from him, to raise the dead and judge the world. Hear then, and never more forget the relation of this great and certain event as given us by our ascended Saviour and future Judge. *The Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left. For the hour is coming, in which all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they who have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they who have done evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation.* Then what St. John saw in a vision, we shall every one of us behold, nor be able to question the reality of the appearance. *A great white throne and the Son of God seated upon it; with a majesty and splendor above the light of the sun; so that from his face the Earth and Heavens shall flee away. And we shall see,—being ourselves of the number, all the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books opened, and the dead judged by the things written in them, according to their works.*

By raising Jesus from the dead, and receiving him into Heaven, after making, in the

the name of God, these declarations, the Almighty hath set the great seal of Heaven to them, and engaged his power, wisdom, and faithfulness for the accomplishment.

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'Tis not then more certain, that *Jesus died, and rose, and revived*, than that *every knee shall bow to him, and he be Lord of the dead and the living*. And 'tis not more certain,

Rom.

xiv. 9.

that we, who are by nature accountable creatures, die out of this world, without having given an account of ourselves unto God, shall every one of us give this account to God, by his Son. What then is evidently our wisdom, but this, to *give all diligence that we be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless?* To resolve from this time forward, and to perform it, that we will not be influenced by any views of pleasure, gain or reputation, to think, or speak, or do any thing, which will expose us to the frown and condemnation of the great Judge, and fill us with confusion in his presence. And that we will, with cheerfulness and constancy, cultivate every pious and virtuous disposition, and practise every good action. Then shall we not be afraid or ashamed *at his coming*. Then shall the trump of the archangel, the presence of the universal Judge, and the burst of a burning and falling world, raise our joy and triumph, and eternity compleat

2 Pet.

iii. 14.

our

SERMON
V.

our happiness, in those *mansions*, which our ascended Saviour *is gone before to prepare* for all *who love and wait for his appearing*.

May God bless what has been offered to make, or to continue us, all of this number, Amen!



S E R M O N VI.

A general Account of our Obligation to search the Scriptures, and of their Inspiration.



J O H N v. 39,

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life; and they testify of me.



A M O N G the most effectual SERMON VI. means for forming in us a religious temper, and engaging and assisting us to a pious and virtuous conduct, are the frequent and serious reading and study of the holy Scriptures. For these contain the instructions, persuasives, and encouragements given

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VI.

Psalms
i. 2, 3.

John
xii. 48.

John
xi. 28.

given us from Heaven by the great lover of souls for effecting these infinitely important purposes. I say the frequent as well as serious perusal of the sacred writings. If we would experience their divine power, to animate us to all virtue and piety, to regulate our whole conduct, and thus to guide us through the paths of true satisfaction unto everlasting felicity, we must make them the subjects of our daily reading and meditation. The person whose soul prospers, and who is *blessed in religion, delights in the law of Jehovah, and meditates therein day and night.* The authority which expressly enjoins this duty cannot be questioned, for the text was spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, who will determine us at last unto eternal life, or everlasting destruction, according to our obedience or disobedience to the instructions which God hath given us in his various revelations. And the encouragement, hinted in the text, to study the Scriptures, is the greatest conceivable, that *in them we have eternal life.* In the writings of the Old Testament, here recommended to the Jews, the New Testament not being then written, this eternal life is but obscurely promised. To us Christians therefore they are chiefly valuable, as they *testify of Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, and who hath brought an incorruptible life to full light, by his*

his gospel. Who hath also clearly taught us by the Scriptures of the New, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope of eternal life, consummate and everlasting felicity, at the glorious appearance of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON
VL
2 Tim.
i. 10.
Tit.
ii. 12.

That I may engage Christians diligently to fulfil this command which our Lord gave to the Jews, and render the observance most beneficial, I would

I. Give a general view of the duty here enjoined, as it is obligatory upon Christians, *Search the Scriptures.*

II. Give particular directions for *searching the Scriptures* to the best purpose, or for rendering our daily serious perusal of them most profitable.

I. I am to give you a general view of the duty here enjoined, as it is obligatory upon all Christians. *Search the Scriptures.*

The books which our Lord recommended to the serious study of the Jews, and stiles *the Scriptures*, or *the Writings*, by way of eminence, were the sacred books of the Old Testament. These contained various intimations of a future life, and many predictions of the *Messiah*. *In them ye think ye have eternal life, and they testify of me.* Of the *prophecies* contained in these books, St. Peter declares, *that they came of old time,*

2 Pet.
i. 21.

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2 Tim.
iii. 15.

Heb.
viii. 6.
John
i. 17.

2 Tim.
i. 10.

Matt.
xii. 31.
Acts
xiii. 38.
Luke
xi. 13.
xxiii. 43.

time, not by the will of man; but holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And of these same writings another inspired apostle of Christ gave this character to Timothy. From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. And if it was the duty and wisdom of the ancient Jews to search the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in order to know the will of God, relating to their duty and happiness, much more is it the duty and wisdom of Christians, daily to read and meditate the Scriptures of the New Testament. For these are not only like the Old, divinely inspired, but they contain brighter and fuller discoveries of the counsels of God, more excellent rules of life, and better promises for encouraging our obedience. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, who abolished death, and brought an incorruptible life to light, by his gospel. He assured believing penitents of the forgiveness of all manner of sin, and of their being justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. He promised also that the Holy Spirit should be

be given in answer to our humble and earnest prayers; and that they who are his true disciples shall be immediately after death admitted to Paradise; and that at the end of this world their bodies shall *be raised to eternal life.*

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John
v. 24.

iii. 34.

Jesus himself *spake the words of God, for God gave not by measure the Spirit unto him, as the works which he did, in the Father's name, abundantly proved.* For by a word he opened the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf; removed the most inveterate diseases, and even raised the dead. And his discourses and actions were committed to writing by eye and ear-witnesses; unto whom also he promised, and to whom he visibly *sent down the Holy Spirit from Heaven on the day of Pentecost*; who was to lead them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance, whatever he had said unto them. The gospels of Matthew and John, written by two of Jesus' apostles, unto whom he promised and gave the Holy Spirit, are therefore justly regarded by us, as *divinely inspired Scriptures.* Mark, who wrote another gospel, and Luke the writer of the other, and of the *acts of the apostles*, were companions of the apostles Peter and Paul; they had therefore a large share of the *miraculous gifts* conferred on the first converts; and from the conversations and sermons of the apostles, and other companions

John
xiv. 16.
xvi. 7.
Acts
ii. 1.

SERMON
VI.

Gal.
i. 12.

Rom.
xv. 15.

2 Pet.
iii. 15.

Rev.
i. 1.

nions of Jesus, had abundant opportunities and advantages for being certainly and fully informed of his doctrines and actions which they related. And both their gospels were * *reviewed and approved* by St. *John*. Their histories therefore are with good reason regarded as authentic relations, and as written under the direction, and approved by the testimony, of the divine Spirit. As for the apostle *Paul*, whose *letters* make a great part of the New Testament, he received the gospel of Jesus, which he preached and wrote, *not from men*, but by *immediate revelation* from the Son of God, after his Ascension into Heaven. To assure of this, our Lord enabled him to prove his divine commission by *miracles* without number. His *epistles* therefore, as well as those of the apostles *John* and *James*, and *Peter* and *Jude*, which contain accounts and enforcements of the doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ, are also, with very good reason, received by us as *inspired Scriptures*, *written according to the wisdom given them from above*. And the *revelations* of *John*, containing predictions of future events, many of which have been accomplished, must in their nature be what they are stiled, *the revelations of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants*.

* See Euseb. Eccl. Hist. L. iii. c. 24.

The *New Testament* therefore, written by apostles and evangelists, together with the inspired writings of the *Old Testament*, are the *Scriptures* which we are obliged; by the commands of our Lord, given in the text and elsewhere, to read constantly, and to meditate with all seriousness and reverence, as containing the revelations which God hath made to mankind, for conducting them through the paths of piety and virtue unto eternal happiness—But the *New Testament* more especially, which contains revelations of general use, precepts of universal and perpetual obligation, motives of the greatest weight, and promises of infinite value.

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It may be useful further to mention, that when we call these divinely inspired writings, we do not assert, that *every word* in them was dictated to the writers immediately by *the Spirit of God*. The contrary to this may be proved from the declarations of the writers themselves. Several of the sacred penmen profess to have written from their *own knowledge and remembrance*; as having been present at the transactions, or from the testimony of eye and ear-witnesses. * Others of them quote the histories and records from which they had

1 John
i. 1.
Luke
i. 1.
2 Pet.
i. 16.
1 Cor.
vii. 12.
2 Cor.
xi. 17.

* Nehem. i. 8. vi. 6. 1 Kings xi. 41, &c. Gen. ii. 4.
Josh. x. 13.

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taken various facts and relations. The difference also of their stile and manner of relating things, according to their different educations and advantages, proves, that though they were guided in their writings by the divine Spirit, yet he did not dictate every word to them *. In what a different strain are the prophecies of *Isaiab* and *Amos* delivered; the first of whom had a princely education, whereas the other was bred an herdsman. Had every sentence and word in their predictions been immediately dictated by the divine Spirit, the stile and sentiments in both would have been alike noble, and the composition equally perfect. The like difference in their manner may be observed between *St. Luke* and *St. John* in their gospels, and *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* in their epistles; though all of them wrote under the direction of an infallible Spirit.

Nor do we farther assert, that the sacred writers had in writing equal degrees of divine influence and revelation; but differing according to the different nature of their writings, and their being in want of larger or less measures of inspiration. The degree of inspiration necessary for a writer of history, who related facts which passed under

* See *Dr. Benson's* Appendix to 1 Tim. v. 23, and *Dr. Doddridge's* Expos. vol. iii. Dissert. 2d.

his own observation, was very different from that which was necessary for prophets, and granted to them; who were sent with particular messages from God, or who foretold future events. All the extraordinary influence which appears to have been necessary for an historian, who was to relate facts which passed under his own observation, or to transcribe from authentic annals and histories, was, that he should be directed by the divine Spirit to mention those facts which would best answer the purposes of the divine Providence and Spirit, and be kept from misrepresenting the events which he related, either through human weakness, party-views, and the like. And that wherever he mentioned the designs of God, in bringing to pass certain events, he should have these designs revealed to him by God immediately, or receive his information from the writings of some prophet.

An higher degree of inspiration, or more abundant influences from the divine Spirit, were required to qualify the *apostles* for giving a just account of the preaching, miracles, and conversations of Jesus Christ; because, through their dulness and prejudices, they did not understand, or actually mistook, many things which he said and did, at the time when they were spoken or done. Discourses, the meaning of which they had mistaken, or not fully understood

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John
xiv. 16.

Acts
ii. 1.

when delivered, they could not justly and certainly have related to us, had not our Lord, according to his promise, sent down the holy Spirit upon them; *who should lead them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance all things* of importance for our salvation, which he had said unto them.

When holy men of God were sent by him with particular messages, or to give laws in his name, or to foretel future events, as were *Moses, the prophets, and apostles*, a still higher degree of inspiration was necessary. As they spake, in the name of God, to render what they said true, they must receive from God what they delivered, in his name. And in predicting future events, as these are above human knowledge in a natural way, the information of these must be given by God in a supernatural. The matter therefore of their laws, their messages, or prophecies, must be immediately and wholly revealed to them by God; although, as to the language in which the inspired persons delivered these, and their various ways of illustrating and enforcing the declarations or commands of God, they seem to have been * left to their different geniuses, education, and advantages. This reasonable supposition easily accounts for the diversity of manner, of

* See Grotius on Matt. i. 22.

strength,

strength, and sublimity in the exhortations of *Moses*, *Isaiab*, or *Jeremiab*, and those of *Hosea* or *Amos*. Whatever they taught, or promised, or threatened, in execution of their commission, as prophets, was really revealed to them by God. And yet they represented these truths in a more commanding or persuasive, in a loftier or plainer manner, according to their differing natural or acquired abilities.

I judged it useful to premise this observation, that we might not be disappointed when we read the Scriptures, by not finding that in them, which it was not intended by God they should contain; nor be offended, if we observed them not to be in every respect so perfect as we should rationally have expected them to be had they been intirely dictated and finished by the divine Spirit. And had not God chosen to reveal himself to us by men, who though they deliver nothing to us as such, which are not the truths of God, yet deliver them with different degrees of excellence in the manner, as they were distinguished one from another, by natural abilities or acquired advantages. A familiar instance will make this clear to the attentive.

2 Cor.
iv. 7.

xi. 6.

Suppose any four ministers, in the city, to be sent with an extraordinary message from God to the inhabitants of *London*, to reprove their vices, and to warn them, that

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unless they generally reformed from their profanation of the Lord's Day, from their neglect of public worship, from common swearing, intemperance, lewdness, and the like vices, they should within six months be destroyed by an earthquake. Although each person thus commissioned by God would agree with the others in precisely determining the vices which provoked the displeasure of God, and as to the punishment which he would inflict on the guilty and impenitent, and neither of them would say any thing, in the name of God, which he had not commanded him; yet the manner of their representing the odiousness and guilt of these sins, and the dreadfulness of the punishments, and the strain of their expostulations and intreaties with the guilty, would be different, according to the different natural tempers, geniuses, and educations of the several prophetic messengers. One would speak more awfully, another more tenderly, and another more vehemently; and yet no one of them would reprove any vice, or threaten any punishment, which they were not immediately directed by God to reprove and threaten. This may be sufficient, as to the general nature of the sacred writings into which we are obliged to search.

As to the duty enjoined, *searching the Scriptures*, it signifies such a serious and attentive

tentive reading and study as are necessary for discovering their real meaning, and correspondent to the importance of the truths which they contain. Divine writings, which relate to our eternal life and felicity, certainly deserve a most serious and deliberate perusal. And would we so read the prophecies, as clearly to discern their reference to Christ, and accomplishment in him, which is what our Lord in the text enjoins the Jews, we shall find an attentive consideration, and a diligent comparison of one part with another to be necessary. And wherever the original word is used, in the New Testament, it signifies a very careful and diligent inquiry into a subject. In this sense St. John uses it, when he mentions the advice given to Nicodemus, to *search the Scriptures, and see whether any prophet was to come out of Galilee.* And in this sense St. Peter employs the word, when he represents the prophets as carefully considering the import of their own predictions; in order to discover the time of the Messiah's appearance, the nature of the salvation which he was to effect, and the methods of accomplishing it. *O how love I thy law, said the pious king, it is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.* We shall not therefore fully observe this direction of our

SERMON
VI.

John
vii. 52.

1 Pet.
i. 11.

Pfalm
cxix.
97, 98.

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Lord, by a negligent and customary reading of the Scriptures; but we must peruse them with that concern and attention, which are necessary for discovering their real meaning, and putting ourselves into possession of the instructions which God designs by them to give us, as to our duty, and our final happiness in eternity.

Had we, Sirs, received instructions from the King, upon our conformity to which our interest and welfare for the present life depended, certainly we should not satisfy ourselves with a slight reading; but often and carefully read and consider them, that we might discover their full meaning, know the whole of what our Sovereign required, and have it constantly in remembrance, and, by practising it, secure life and happiness. And were any parts less clear, we should more carefully consider these, and consult with persons qualified to give us their just and full import. And thus, if we are wise, we shall act in regard to those declarations of the divine will, the commands, promises, and threatenings which our heavenly Father hath given us in the sacred Scriptures; on our honest conformity and obedience to which, not only our main happiness for this life, but our intire happiness for eternity depends. Did we seriously consider from whom the sacred writings come, and what their

their great design is ; that they are the in-
structions of our Maker, our Sovereign,
and Judge, graciously given to guide us in
the way of piety, virtue, and everlasting
blessedness ; this would dispose us to con-
sult them constantly with that serious con-
cern and diligent application of mind,
which our reason will inform us are neces-
sary for discovering the whole counsel of
God, in relation to our happiness, and
complying with it. And we should be
ready and determined to observe those di-
rections which will be given for searching
the Scriptures, so as to be made by them
wise unto salvation.

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VI.

Reserving these for another Discourse, I
would conclude at present with two reflec-
tions on this part of the subject.

1. Does our Lord command the com-
mon people of the Jews to *search the Scrip-
tures*, and even the most obscure and diffi-
cult parts of them, the prophetic, in order
to their knowing him, and finding eternal
life? This shews the right of all to read
the Scriptures, and the injustice of the
church of *Rome*, in denying this privilege
to the Laity. If the Jews were required,
from Children, to read the Scriptures of
the *Old Testament*, and directed to study
the prophecies, that they might discover a
sure guide to eternal life, certainly the
Christian Laity ought to have free access to
the

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VI.

the instructions of this divine Guide, who hath plainly and distinctly given them his counsels and directions in the *New*. Their pretence for denying this advantage to the Laity is this, *that the Scriptures are hard to be understood, and liable to be perverted by the ignorant vulgar; as if God, speaking by his prophets, and the Son of God, speaking in person and by his apostles, wanted the wisdom or goodness necessary to their speaking as plainly whatever concerned the eternal happiness of those to whom they revealed themselves; as the bishop of Rome or his priests pretend to have done. That they have indeed spoken more clearly, as well as given to the world true religion free from the many corruptions which the Romish clergy, for worldly purposes, have mixed with it, any person of common sense may be assured, by barely comparing a chapter of the Gospel with a chapter of the councils of Constance or Trent. The truth is, Christ and his apostles have spoken much too plainly for their purposes; and any person of common understanding or honesty may see, that the doctrines and precepts of Christ directly contradict those of Popery. Take as instances their doctrines relating to the worship of images, prayers to angels and saints departed, as mediators for them with God, their calling men upon Earth fathers, and*

yielding to them implicit obedience, in matters of conscience and religion—their teaching the superabundant merit of those whom Christ declares to be *unprofitable servants*—their obliging the Laity to recite their prayers in a language unknown to them—their employing the sword to propagate what they call religion—and pretending to introduce persons into the kingdom of Heaven, though destitute of personal holiness and obedience, by virtue of the priestly absolution, a friar's garment, and the like.

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The New Testament is certainly more easy to be understood than the Old; and of the Old Testament the prophecies are the most obscure part; yet these our Lord commanded the Jewish people to search diligently, that they might obtain everlasting life. It must therefore certainly be his will, that the Christian Laity should have free access to his Scriptures, first published in the vulgar language of the people to whom they were given. And Christians cannot want encouragement to read them, when they contain express promises of eternal life; and our Lord hath also assured us, that *if any man be willing to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.*

John
vii. 17.

If there be then such a thing as injustice and cruelty to the souls of men, the rulers
of

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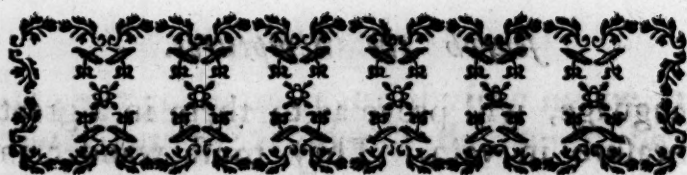
of the *Romish* church are guilty of these; who, when a merciful God had given unto men clear and full instructions, as to the way unto everlasting blessedness, commanded them diligently to study these, and promised them his blessing and guidance; by violence take these Scriptures out of their hands, and give them, in their stead, a heap of ignorance, falsehood, and absurdity, of superstitious, and corrupting doctrines and rites; which, instead of instructing and assisting them in the way to happiness and in their preparation for the pure and divine enjoyments of Heaven, debase their minds and unfit them for partaking in the heavenly blessedness.

Do you therefore, Sirs, highly value your privilege, as Protestants, who have free access to the sacred Scriptures, be thankful to God for it, and faithfully improve it. Consult daily these divine instructors, and follow their directions, through the paths of rational piety and real virtue unto everlasting blessedness.

2. Is it the plain duty and inestimable privilege of all to *search the Scriptures*? Hence we learn the obligation on Christian Parents to give their Children such an education as shall qualify them to read and consult these. If Children are not taught to read, the goodness of divine Providence in giving us the Scriptures, in our own language,

language, will prove as to them in a great measure in vain. They must wander in ignorance, error, and uncertainty, incapable of consulting themselves the Scriptures; and by the ignorance consequent on such an education, being rendered very unfit to profit by the public instructions of the Christian Ministry. The poorest Parents therefore should strive hard to give their Children this advantage, for becoming rich in knowledge and faith, and blessed for ever. And if their poverty disables any for supplying the small expence necessary to their receiving this instruction, they should apply to the rich and charitable. And they, whom God hath blessed with riches, cannot better employ a part of these, than in thus advancing the merciful designs of God and the Redeemer in his revelation, the assisting the present improvement, and securing the everlasting salvation of mankind. Thanks be to God there are many generous provisions made for these purposes, and many to be found who are ready to this good work. May such persons never be wanting, and may their pious and generous charity be encouraged by its abundant success. Amen.

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S E R M O N VII.

Directions for attaining the true
Sense of the Holy Scriptures.



JOHN V. 39.

*Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think
ye have eternal Life; and they testify of
me.*

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I

IN the preceding Discourse I gave
you a general view of the duty
here enjoined, as it obliges all
Christians—*Search the Scriptures.*

II. I am now to give particular direc-
tions for searching the Scriptures, so as to
answer the best purposes. These direc-
tions may be reduced under *two* heads; of
those necessary to be observed in order to
our discovering the real meaning of the sa-
cred writers; and of those the observation
of

of which will assist us in attaining the great end for which the holy Scriptures were given, our becoming habitually pious and virtuous, and thus wise unto salvation.

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I. Let me offer to your consideration some rules, the observance of which will greatly assist the serious and inquisitive in discovering the true sense of Scripture. Out of many which might be mentioned, let me select and recommend the following.

I. The first rule I would recommend to be constantly observed in our study of the holy Scriptures is, that we never admit any interpretation of particular passages, which is evidently inconsistent with the plain and allowed deductions of reason, in relation to the divine perfections, or the duties and obligations of morality. Upon these plain deductions of reason alone, we can rationally found our faith of a divine revelation. Every supernatural revelation, and all faith yielded to it, suppose, as principles before known and proved, the existence and providence of a most wise, righteous, and good God; who governs mankind with perfect equity, and requires, as the great conditions of his favour, that *they do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him.* How could we reasonably credit a revelation, even supposing it to be made by God, unless we can safely trust to what reason dictates, that God is too wise
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to be deceived, and too righteous and good to deceive his creatures—*that it is impossible for God to lie?* And as there may be, and really are, evil spirits of great power and sagacity, as well as good spirits, how could we distinguish signs and wonders, which are wrought by evil spirits, from those wrought by God or his angels, to confirm some revelation, but by the contrariety of these revealed doctrines and precepts to what human reason clearly teaches concerning the divine perfections; and the acceptableness unto God of those manifestly right dispositions; reverence, gratitude, love, trust, and subjection to God; righteousness, goodness, mercy, and fidelity to men; and a steady moderation of our appetites and passions? What proposition more evident, than that *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, and abhorreth violence, injustice, and cruelty? And that a most wise and benevolent Deity will prescribe laws, the observance of which will, upon the whole, best promote the moral improvement and real welfare of his creatures in this, and in a following state? No divine revelation therefore can contain doctrines plainly contradictory to these fundamental truths; or allow men to hope that they may please God without becoming righteous, merciful, temperate, grateful, and pious; or by indulging to con-

trary dispositions ; for God cannot contradict himself, nor act unworthy of his essential perfections.

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Should therefore any passages of Scripture at the first view appear, to teach doctrines directly contradictory to the moral perfections of God, discouraging the practice of virtue, or encouraging the contrary ; we must not admit any such sense as the genuine sense of Scripture, but search for a meaning consistent with those perfections on which our faith in a divine revelation is founded. Thus the phrases in which God is represented as having *eyes, hands, feet*, and the like, since in their literal meaning inconsistent with the nature and perfections of God, who is an every-where present and all-perfect Spirit, are to be understood as figurative expressions, in which God condescends to the weakness of men. And they signify no more than that God knows as well what is done every where, as we know what passes before our eyes at noon ; that his power can effect every where all that the strongest hands can do any where, and infinitely more ; and that he can succour in the most distant places those who apply to him, much sooner than the swiftest feet can carry a man from one place to another.

Thus again, when the Scriptures speak of God as *hardening* the wicked, and particularly

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larly *Pharoah*, we must not take the meaning to be, that God, by an impulse on the mind, forces men to do what he hath forbidden them, and then punishes them for so doing; because this is evidently repugnant to justice and goodness. But the meaning is, that in the course of his wise and righteous Providence, he, for effecting the best purposes, so disposes events as he sees their wicked hearts will take occasion from it, though unreasonably, to encourage themselves in wickedness. All that, according to *Moses'* relation, was done by God to harden *Pharoah* was this—He brought upon him at first lighter plagues, and upon his entreaties, several times removed them, even after he had broken his promises of obedience; from which gentle treatment, this wicked prince took occasion to persist in his obstinate refusal of permitting the *Israelites* to leave *Egypt*.

Thus also, when *St. Paul*, speaking of the divine Providence over men in this life, represents God as choosing some to be *vessels of mercy*, and to enjoy peculiar privileges, as he wills; and hardening and rejecting others, *whom he pleases*; we must not interpret these Scriptures as teaching, that the righteous Governor of the world hath no regard to the good or evil dispositions and actions of men, in his finally rewarding or punishing them, but acts from
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mere pleasure, because this proceeding would be contrary to righteousness and goodness. But we must critically enquire into the meaning of these Scriptures, till we find a sense consistent with the impartial righteousness of God. And by a fair enquiry we shall find, that these declarations were intended to teach us no more than this—That God, as it pleaseth him, without any antecedent good desert of theirs, gives to some, privileges and advantages which he grants not to others, yet will at last judge the favoured persons in righteousness, and reward or punish them according to their improvement or abuse of their superior advantages. And that as he sees best, from the multitude of the wicked, he selects some to make examples of them in the present life, whom, by way of punishment, he infatuates to their ruin; having *first exercised long patience* with these *vessels of wrath*, by their own wickedness *fitted for destruction*.

Since therefore reason with full evidence demonstrates, and the holy Scriptures by repeated declarations confirm it, that *God is good unto all; that his tender mercies are over all his works. That he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works; that he is not a respecter of persons, but accepteth, in every nation, him who feareth God, and worketh righteousness*—and that, as the

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sovereign Judge of mankind, *he will judge every man in righteousness according to his works*; we ought to lay these evident truths before us as rules, according to which we will always interpret the Scriptures. And we should never admit an interpretation contradictory to these evident truths, since God cannot contradict himself. And to suppose that the Scriptures could teach any doctrines evidently repugnant to the moral perfections of God, would be to make them subvert their own authority. For the goodness, righteousness, and truth of God are the foundation of our faith in him, and in his revelations, of our love, gratitude, and obedience to him, and of all our expectations from him in time and for eternity.

2. Another rule proper to be observed in studying the Scriptures, if we would discover their genuine sense, is to prepare ourselves for it by an acquaintance with the opinions, customs, and manners of the times wherein the writers lived, and to have a constant regard to these in our interpretation of their writings. It was undoubtedly a principal design of the sacred authors to be understood by those to whom they spoke, and to profit them. The signification of words and phrases depends greatly on the prevailing opinions and customs of the persons by whom they are spoken.

spoken. The divine messengers, if they would profit those to whom they addressed themselves, must correct their false opinions, reprove their vices, and guard them against the errors, corruptions, and temptations to which they were most incident; and recommend to them the duties and virtues most necessary in their peculiar circumstances, and enforce the practice by motives suited to the genius, apprehensions, and circumstances of the persons whom they would influence. If we would therefore discover their real and full meaning, we must inform ourselves, as well as we can, what these were; and by their reference and correspondence to these, determine the sense of the sacred instructors. For to interpret their discourses, as regarding notions and practices which were not known till some ages after, is a sure way to misunderstand them. Yet of this gross fault numbers of Expositors have been notoriously guilty. One obvious and important instance will evidence the necessity of observing this rule, and the ill consequences of neglecting it.

All, who with any attention have read the *Acts of the Apostles*, know, that the great controversy between the apostles and *Jewish* converts, who continued zealous for the law of *Moses*, was this; whether it were necessary for the *Gentile* converts, if

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they would become the covenant people of God, and partake of salvation by Christ, to be *circumcised*, and to observe the rites and ceremonies which God by *Moses* had enjoined to the *Jews*. And although the apostles and elders and brethren assembled in council at *Jerusalem* had determined this question in favour of the *Gentiles*, and declared an observance of the *law of Moses* unnecessary for them; and that *faith in Christ*, joined with *repentance towards God*, was all necessary for introducing persons into a state of salvation; and that an obedience to the laws of Christ afterward, was sufficient to continue them in it, and that *Christ might become unto them the author of eternal salvation*; yet the *Judaizers* continued to require obedience to the *law of Moses*, and gave to *St. Paul*, the apostle of the *Gentiles*, great trouble on this subject. In opposition to them, the apostle, in his epistles, frequently asserted, that the *law of Moses* was obligatory on the *Jews* alone, and that both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, having sinned greatly, could be saved only by the *grace* and mercy of God forgiving their past sins, and not by any preceding righteousness of their own. That the only conditions of forgiveness required by a merciful God, under the new dispensation, were *repentance towards God*, and *faith in our Lord Jesus*. And that, to continue in this

state of favour, they needed not to be *circumcised*, and obey the *law of Moses*; but it was sufficient to conform to the gospel of Christ, *teaching them to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ.* These assertions, that Christians are *justified by faith alone, without the works of the law*, and the like, some applying to a dispute, which has arisen in later ages of the church, whether *faith alone* in Christ were sufficient to *final salvation*, without obedience to him in whom Christians believe as their *Prophet and King*; have from hence inferred this false, corrupt, and dangerous doctrine, in contradiction to the whole tenour of Scripture, and the dictates of every honest mind—That *faith alone*, by which they mean a *confident appropriation* to themselves of the *righteousness of Christ*, is all necessary to their being accepted of God and eternally blessed. And that works of holiness and obedience to the gospel avail no more to our final salvation; though the Scriptures often declare we shall be judged, and determined to eternal life according to these; than circumcision, sacrifices, and legal purifications—A mistake this; into which persons could not have run, or have continued, had they attended to this rea-

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sonable rule, of considering the occasion of the apostle's writings, or the opinions and circumstances of the persons to whom his epistles are addressed.

As, beside the books of the *Old Testament*, we have no Jewish writers so old as our Lord's incarnation, except the authors of the few books called the *Apocrypha*, which have their use for explaining the Scriptures; if we would gain a competent knowledge of the opinions, customs, and manners of the *Patriarchs*, *Israelites*, and their cotemporaries, we must carefully consult the historical books of the *Old Testament*. By reading attentively the historical parts of *Moses*' writings and the book of *Josbua*, we may learn the most that is now to be known of the genius, religions and moral sentiments, customs, and the like, of the ancient inhabitants of the earth, of the *Patriarchs* and *Israelites*; and be best qualified to understand the reasons of the divine dispensations, the meaning of the laws prescribed to them, the wisdom of these, and the use we may make of them. The history of *Job*, contained in the two first, and the last chapters of that book, if read with care, will assist us to discern on which side truth stood in the debates between him and his friends, and what improvement we are to make of the promiscuous dispensation of good and evil in

in this life. The history of *David*, contained in the books of *Samuel* and of the *Kings*, will throw great light upon his *Psalms*, most of which had their rise from some peculiar circumstances of his life. The histories of *Israel* and *Judah* in his and in later times, will mightily assist us in understanding the prophets and moral instructors of the Old Testament.

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The knowledge also which may be derived from hence of the religious opinions, practices, manners, and the like, of the Jews, joined to the historical parts of the gospels, will much assist us in understanding the doctrines, admonitions, parables, and precepts of our Lord. To which if we add, a careful perusal of the history of the Jews and of those times given us by *Josephus*, or of the history collected from him and other ancient writers by Dr. *Prideaux* in his *Connection*, we shall obtain abundant light and satisfaction, as to the genuine sense of the *apostolic* writings. The history of the *Acts* carefully read and well digested, will also prepare us to read the *Epistles* with understanding and improvement. One of the best *Summaries* of the particulars of this kind, the knowledge of which is necessary for understanding the *New Testament*, is prefixed to a translation of the *New Testament* into *French*, made by order of the late king of *Prussia*; and this

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this *Summary* may be had in *English*. Dr. *Watts's Summary of the History of the Bible* may be also read by common Christians with advantage.

The design of *Commentators* upon the Scriptures is to present to the reader's view, at proper places, whatever particulars of this kind they have collected from the Scriptures and other ancient writers. And they who can have their assistance will not neglect it, if they have a just value for religious knowledge, and a proper concern for their eternal salvation. Bishop *Patrick*, and his *Continuator*, but not his equal, *Lowth*, have given us the best *English* commentary on the *Old Testament*. The *first* volume of *Poole's Annotations* is also a valuable performance. For assisting us in understanding the *New Testament*, *Whitby*, *Clarke*, *Doddridge*, *Locke*, *Taylor*, and others, who have pursued *Locke's* method, will be found very useful. In short, whether we read the Scriptures with or without commentaries, if we desire to attain their true sense, we must keep constantly in mind the notions, manners, and circumstances of the persons to whom they were originally addressed, and for whose use they were in the first place designed; although they were written also for our instruction and comfort, on whom the conclusion of the ages, or divine dispensations, is come.

come. If thus read, they may be made of SERMON
VII.
the greatest use, for guiding us through the
paths of genuine piety, righteousness, and
goodness unto everlasting life.

3. Another rule proper to be observed, if
we would study the Scriptures with suc-
cess, is to attend unto the general design of
the sacred writings, and by this determine
the sense of incidental passages; and from
the clear doctrines of Scripture to borrow
light, and throw it upon places which are
obscure. St. Paul informs us, that the 2 Tim.
iii. 15.
design of the Scriptures of the Old Testa-
ment, besides preparing men to believe in
Christ, was to be *for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, and instruction in righteous-
ness; that we might be perfect, thoroughly
furnished to every good work.* He hath also
assured us, that this was the general design Tit.
ii. 11.
of God in manifesting his grace or good-
ness in the gospel; *that denying all ungod-
liness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,
righteously, and godly in the present world;
looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious
appearance of the great God, and of our Sa-
viour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us,
that he might redeem us from all iniquity,
and purify unto himself a peculiar people,
zealous of good works.* And this Titus was
to insist on constantly as the great design of
the Christian revelation. *These things speak* ii. 15.
and exhort; and rebuke with all authority,
all

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all whose doctrines are contrary. He therefore calls the gospel *a doctrine according to godliness, σωφροσύνη*, i. e. rational and amiable piety, in opposition to a malevolent and terrifying superstition, *δεισιδαιμονία*. And he farther charges Titus, *this is a faithful saying, and this I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who believe in God, be careful to maintain good works*. And a greater than he, our divine Master, hath informed us, that *on these two commandments, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, hang all the law and the prophets*.

Matt.
xxii. 37.

Reason also affects entirely to these declarations, and assures us, that the great design of Revelation must be to teach men to think rightly and honourably of God, that they may reverence, love, and obey him in truth, and endeavour to please him by an imitation of his righteousness and goodness; and thus qualify themselves to enjoy the proper happiness of rational and immortal beings, in the full favour, resemblance, and love of God. Should therefore some obscure texts, as they stand in the *English Version*, seem to teach doctrines inconsistent with the love of God or of our neighbour, we are certainly obliged to reject this sense of these texts, and seek for some other consistent with the great design of religion; and such a sense may

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generally

generally be found, without great difficulty, by the honest and serious. SERMON
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For instance, should these words of the 51st Psalm, *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*, be urged to prove—that all the human offspring, who are shapen by God as really as *Adam* was, are formed with constitutions irresistibly inclining them to sin, and impotent and averse to all good; and that God punishes the greater part of them with everlasting misery, for committing sins which they cannot forbear, such is the nature which he hath given them—we must utterly reject this interpretation of the text. For if it is believed, it will destroy all rational foundation of love to God, by representing him as unholy, unjust, and unmerciful. It would also destroy the love of our neighbour, whom we could not reasonably love, if men are *devils* or half-devils by nature; nor even will to love, if we ourselves were born with such a malicious disposition. Certain therefore that this blasphemous interpretation cannot be the meaning of holy Scripture; and from plain declarations of *David*, in other Psalms being assured, that he believed God the maker of man to be infinitely wise and good; we shall easily learn to interpret this figurative passage to this consistent sense, that he was early inclined to lewdness, so early, that he could not remember when the inclination commenced.

Psalm
cxxxix.
13.

Pf. c.
Pf. cxix.
73.
Pf. lviii.
3.
Job
xxxi. 18.
Eccl.
i. 14.

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With regard to the *Epistles*, written by the apostles, our Lord upon particular occasions, the advice given by Mr. *Locke* cannot be too strictly observed. We are to read them through once or twice with a view to discover the main design of them; and having discovered this, to keep it constantly in our eye; since we must suppose that every consistent writer of letters would do this. And we are then to interpret the whole in consistence and subservience to this general design, and explain by it passages obscure or indeterminate. Thus we should now explain letters which we received from a man of judgment and integrity; and thus only we can be rationally assured that we attain his meaning and conform to his advice *.

4. Would we judge aright with regard to the precepts and examples recorded in Scripture, how far we are obliged to fulfil the one, and imitate the other, we must consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the commands were given; and how far ours are parallel to theirs, that we may know whether the reason of the command extends to us; we should also consider the peculiar characters, circumstances, and the like, of those persons whose actions are related, and how nearly ours cor-

* Here this Sermon may be divided when read in the family.

respond,

respond, that we may know whether it be our duty, or even lawful to imitate them. In the early ages of the world, mankind like children were generally fond of what was sensible and showy in religion; and more governed by it, than by what was rational and spiritual. And when Jehovah brought the *Israelites* out of *Egypt*, the world was over-run with an idolatry, not only pompous and ceremonious, but which made the most abominable uncleanness, and the most horrid cruelties, parts of their worship. In this state of things had God prescribed to the *Israelites*, educated amidst the superstition and show of *Egypt*, a worship purely rational and spiritual, they would soon have deserted it for the pomp and ceremonies of idolatry, though they received all its corrupt and wicked rites along with it. It was therefore worthy the divine wisdom, when God designed to revive the knowledge and worship of himself in the world, in opposition to all idolatrous and wicked corruptions of religion, to indulge the weakness and prejudices of his own people with a form of worship pompous and full of external rites; as for the *hardness of their hearts*, he indulged them in *divorces*; this was a discipline likely to preserve them from a corrupting superstition, and gradually to raise them to a worship entirely rational and spiritual. But now that *in the fulness*

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fulness of time, and the manhood of the world, Jesus Christ hath taught men to worship God in spirit and in truth, and hath abolished the ceremonious and pompous ritual of the Jews; to take occasion and authority from their rites, as the Papists have done, to substitute again external pomp and numerous ceremonies in the room of the true knowledge of God, worthy sentiments of the greatest and best Being, exalted veneration, grateful love, and obedience, and a resemblance to him in righteousness, goodness, and truth—This, though to persons who do not consider the different circumstances of mankind, it may appear to have the countenance of Scripture, is yet really as absurd, as for a man grown, to return to the exercises and sports of his childhood. Gallat. iv. 1.

The *Jews*, by their situation in *Palestine*, where the *Philistines* and *Canaanites* possessed the sea-ports, were, for the most part, excluded from commerce, and incapable of improving money in trade. The poor therefore alone borrowed money, and this merely to supply their immediate necessities. *Levit. xxv. 35.*—The law of God therefore forbade them the taking *usury* for money lent to their poor brethren, while it allowed them to take it from strangers. And the *Psalmist* makes it part of the character of the pious *Israelite* who should find acceptance

Psalms
xv. 5.

acceptance with God, that *he puts not out* SERMON
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his money to usury; that is, he is merciful,
considers the cases of the poor, and assists
them. But since among us where com-
merce flourishes, and is the source of
riches, persons who borrow money are ca-
pable of making by it as much profit in
trade as the farmer of an estate which he
rents; it is as lawful and equitable to take
a reasonable interest for the loan of money,
as a reasonable rent for an estate. This
may be sufficient to prove the necessity and
advantage of considering the circumstances
of the persons to whom the laws recorded
in Scripture were given, in order to judge
of their goodness, and their obligation
upon us.

It is also necessary to consider the pecu-
liar characters and circumstances of good
men, whose lives and actions are recorded
in Scripture, if we would judge aright
how far we are to imitate them. The
particular circumstances of *Abraham* and
Jacob, and the general practice in their
time, rendered it lawful for them to have
more wives than one; which practice
would be criminal in Christians, who, in
the marriage-contract, solemnly promise
the contrary; and who, living under a
more spiritual dispensation, are required,
by their divine Master, to conform to the
original institution of Paradise, which joined

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one man to one wife, in an indissoluble union. *Matt. xix. 3.*—The example of *Joshua* and the *Israelites*, who extirpated the people of *Canaan*, for their abominable idolatries and wickedness, must not be pleaded by any Christians, as a precedent for destroying those whom they think idolaters, and for establishing the true religion in any country by the sword. Because the *Canaanites* were a people whom God, who knew their hearts, had declared to be incorrigible, and by name sentenced to destruction. And in consequence of this sentence, their destruction was as visibly from the hand of God, as if they had perished by a pestilence. For God, by a visible miracle, divided *Jordan*, and gave the *Israelites*, whom he appointed the executioners of his vengeance, an entrance into their country. By a visibly miraculous interposition he also threw down the walls of *Jericho*, and afterwards destroyed more of this devoted people, by great hailstones from Heaven, and the like. God had wisely determined not to suffer any idolatry in the land of *Canaan*, lest the *Israelites* might be infected with it; and, to give them the more lasting abhorrence of their idolatries, appointed them to execute his vengeance on these abominable idolaters. And it should be observed, that they were not afterwards commanded or allowed to extirpate the inhabitants

habitants of other countries because they were idolaters; or to propagate by the sword the true religion beyond the limits of *Palastine*. None therefore can with reason plead the example of the *Israelites*, for destroying those whom they call idolaters, or propagating by violence what they may think the true religion, unless they are like the *Israelites*, indisputably commissioned, and miraculously guided and supported by almighty God.

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When we study the example of Christ, with a design to form our temper and life by it, we must consider and allow for what was peculiar in his character, dignity, and perfections. He who was the *only begotten* of the Father, and appointed Lord of all, who was infallibly wise and knew the hearts of men, might with authority reprove the greatest among men; and, if they were hypocrites, might, without a breach of justice or charity, stile them such. Whereas we who are *servants*, not *sons*, men frail, fallible, and ignorant of the hearts of other men, must not assume this authority, nor take these freedoms, but *in meekness instruct them who oppose*, that God may give them repentance.

The apostles of our Lord, who were guided by his infallible Spirit, and to whom he said, *he who beareth you beareth me*, might deliver their doctrines and precepts,

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not as the *words of men, but of God*; but uninspired ministers, who come after them, cannot use this language without presumption; nor can the people submit to such claims, without violating the allegiance which they owe to the *one Lord Christ*. In short, the applying what is said in the New Testament of the apostles, and immediate disciples of Christ, who were endowed with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, who praying by the Spirit, were assured of receiving whatever they asked, and who, speaking by the Spirit, were above the assistance of learning, premeditation, and the like, and guided by the Spirit into all necessary truth—the applying what was promised to them unto Christians in following ages, hath given occasion or countenance to the enthusiasm which in later ages hath deformed and disgraced the christian religion. This is the sole support of the *Quakers*, and others like them, who should remember, that the apostles and first Christians, who claimed inspiration, proved themselves possessed of it by *miracles*; and that it is arrogance in any to claim this inspiration, who cannot in like manner prove, that they are favoured with it.

These instances, omitting many others, sufficiently demonstrate how necessary it is to consider whether there be any thing peculiar in the characters and circumstances

of the persons recorded in Scripture, if we would know in what actions, and how far, we are bound to imitate them. The plain precepts of the gospel are our only certain rule; examples are of great use to excite us to our duty, and direct us in the practice; but they have no farther the obligation of laws, than as they are warranted and enforced by precepts, and our circumstances are parallel to theirs whom we would imitate.

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5. If we would search the Scriptures, so as to discover their genuine sense, and be guided by them to eternal life, we must consider and allow for the peculiar genius of the language in which they were written, and compare one passage of Scripture with another. The *Eastern* languages, and the *Hebrew* in particular, are very bold and figurative in their manner of expression, and have many other peculiarities which greatly distinguish them from our *Northern* languages. The *New Testament* also, being written by persons conversant in the *Old*, and who derived from it their religious sentiments, though it be written in the *Greek* language, hath the genius and idiom of the *Hebrew* visibly running through it. A constant regard must therefore be had to this idiom, and one part of the Scriptures carefully compared with another, by him, who would not content himself with a faith

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expressed in the words of Scripture, but would have his faith formed on their real meaning. Dr. TAYLOR'S *Key to the Apostolic Writings*, if carefully applied, will be found of excellent service for letting persons into the true sense of the New Testament, and especially of the Epistles.

It is usual in the *Hebrew* phraseology to ascribe all events to God, even those events which he merely permits or over-rules; and as to those in which several agents besides were employed, because he is the principal, to speak of the work as if he alone effected it. Thus the change produced within bad men, when they become good, is represented by *God's creating in them a new heart, giving life to the dead, and the like*. From hence some have inferred, that, when sinners repent and are converted, this change in their tempers is entirely produced by a divine Power, and that the converted do nothing towards it, and have nothing to do, but are only to suffer the happy change; whereas had they considered the genius of the language, and compared these expressions with other texts, which command sinners *to repent, and turn themselves, to make to themselves new hearts, to awake and rise from the dead*, they might have perceived their method of expounding scripture to be rash and fallacious. They would then have

have learned, that there must be a concurrence of our hearty and unwearied endeavours with the Grace and Spirit of God, if we would be saved; and that we must *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*, for this very reason, that *God worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure*; whose good pleasure it is to assist those who will strive to enter the strait gate.

Again; it is usual in Scripture to express in the same manner the mere event, and the design of producing the event. From hence some have drawn this horrid conclusion, that God originally designed the wickedness and misery of sinful men, which he merely permits. 'Tis a frequent expression in Scripture, *these things were done that it might be fulfilled*; as if the event was appointed and effected for the sake of the prediction. But to give an English reader the true meaning of the phrase, it should have been rendered, *these things were done, and thus was fulfilled*; since because the event would be, God in his wisdom predicted it. Thus we must understand *John xii. 38*—God did not harden the Jews, because he had foretold they would be hardened; but because he foresaw they would harden themselves, therefore he foretold it; that their generally rejecting Jesus, the true Messiah,

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might not be perverted into an argument against his divine mission. In a like phraseology Christ says, *I came not to send peace, but a sword*, Matthew x. 34. Not that it was his design, when he published his benevolent and peaceable religion, to set men at variance; but this would be the effect produced by the contrariety of his holy religion to the sinful passions and prejudices of men. St. Luke ix. 45, speaking of the effect, which our Lord's foretelling his sufferings and death had upon his apostles, says, *this was hid from them, that they might not perceive it*. In the original, it is *καὶ κρύβαντες αὐτοῖς*. This can only denote the event; for it would be absurd to suppose, that when the Son of God took so much pains to make them understand it, his Father would purposely conceal it from them. Our translators were sensible of the absurdity, and have translated the phrase *that they perceived it not*; and thus they ought to have rendered the phrase in many other places. *Jeremiah* also, xlv. 3, 7, 8, in the name of God tells the Jews, *ye have committed wickedness, to provoke me to anger; ye have committed this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman. Ye provoke me, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and reproach among all the nations. But the prophet cannot be supposed to mean,*
that

that the Jews designed to provoke God to cut them off, and to make them a curse, but that this would be the certain event and effect of their wickedness. SERMON
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And to give one example more, it was usual with the *Hebrews*, when two things are mentioned, one of which is greatly to be preferred, to express themselves, as if the thing of inferior value was to be wholly neglected. Thus we are to understand the declaration, *I desired mercy and not sacrifice*, *Hosea* vi. 6. that God greatly preferred mercy; for the prophet immediately explains it to this sense, *and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings*. Thus also God is said, *to have loved Jacob*, and *to have hated Esau*, *Malachi* i. 2, 3. because he preferred *Jacob*, and distinguished him and his posterity by his favours; although he conferred many blessings upon *Esau*. And thus our Lord requires his disciples for his sake *to hate father and mother, and even their own lives*, *Luke* xiv. 26; that is, to love them less than him, and his truths and religion. Thus also in the same chapter, recommending charity to the poor, he says, *When thou makest a feast, call not thy friends and rich neighbours, but call the poor, the lame and the blind*. Not that Christ forbids to feast our friends, but he would have us prefer expences of bounty and compassion

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compassion on those who need our kindness, and who cannot recompence us.

These instances prove, that if persons would *search the Scriptures*, so as to discover their real meaning, they must not interpret particular texts to mean what would seem to be the sense, if they were *literally* translated into *English*; but they must have regard to the genius of the *Original*, and compare one passage with another, in which they may be assisted by a Concordance. And this would prove a yet greater assistance, were the same original word always rendered by the same English word.

6. Would we derive from the Scriptures a knowledge of divine truths, we must consider who is represented as speaking, in the part we are reading; and not receive every thing asserted, as spoken by God, or by authority from him. In the book of *Job*, the friends of *Job* dispute with him concerning the dispensations of Providence, and assert, that extraordinary calamities are proofs of extraordinary wickedness in the sufferers; and uncharitably intimate, that therefore *Job's* apparent piety was hypocrisy, and that his uncommon sufferings were proofs, that he was a very bad man. This prevailing sentiment of theirs is declared by God, at the close of the book, to be

be false and unjust. We must not therefore receive this sentiment of theirs as true; though we find it intermixed with many noble assertions and descriptions of the divine Perfections and Providence. And we cannot build on any thing they assert as certain truth, any farther than their sentiments are confirmed by reason and experience, or by declarations of men divinely inspired. The same may be observed with regard to *Job's* discourses, who though not so mistaken in his sentiments of divine Providence as his friends were, hath yet mingled many sentiments and expressions of human frailty and passion, with those divine truths which he nobly asserted.

In the greater part of the *lxxiii Psalm*, the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the pious, are aggravated beyond truth and experience; and in the close, the Psalmist condemns what he had before asserted, as the language of passion, folly, and discontent; we must not therefore regard the former part of his representation of the divine proceedings as inspired truths, least we prove ourselves as foolish and ignorant as he stiles himself for having indulged such thoughts.

In the book of *Ecclesiastes*, to prove the vanity of human life, and particularly of human knowledge, *Solomon* delivers several sentiments in the person of a *Sceptic*,
which

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which therefore we must not take for divine truths ; especially, as they do not agree with other declarations of Scripture manifestly divine, nor with his own assertions in the same book.

And to name but one instance more, St. Paul in his Epistle to the *Romans*, ch. iii. suggests some objections of the Jews, which he answers immediately, without marking them as objections. From hence some careless readers have taken occasion to imagine, that St. Paul taught the doctrine which he refuted. What he declared also in the viith chapter, in his own person, to avoid offence, of the condition of a *Jew, destitute of the faith and grace of the gospel*, v. 9, &c. as in vain struggling against sin, and a slave to it, hath, by like inattention, been supposed to be spoken by him concerning himself as regenerate. Although the character he gives of the regenerate in the vith and viiith chapters is the direct contrary ; and he describes them as *made free from sin, the servants of God, and having their fruit unto holiness ; as walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit ; and by the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, made free from the law of sin and death.*

It is not therefore sufficient to assure us of the truth of a sentiment, that it is strongly exprest in the words of Scripture, but we must consider whether it is delivered,

vered, as a divine truth, or as a sentiment received from God, by an inspired person. SERMON
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7. If we would observe the preceding rules, in the best manner, we must study the Scriptures with impartiality, that is, with an honest and prevailing concern to discover their true meaning; and not with a secret resolution to make them speak in favour of notions we have already embraced, and of practices in which we have allowed ourselves. This would be making the divine authority and truth stoop to our errors, humours, and passions, or to the authority of fallible men, and the interests of a party. The genuine sense of holy Scripture alone is the revelation of God, the sure foundation of our faith and hope; and the rule by which our present conduct must be directed, and by which our final state will be decided. To discover this is therefore above all things the concern of Christians. The most earnest wishes and confident prejudices cannot change human errors into divine truths, or alter the fixed terms of acceptance with God and everlasting felicity. Instead therefore of coming to the Scriptures, with a resolution to find in them the favourite tenets of a party, and right or wrong to draw from them proofs to countenance these, Christians ought to come with a determined resolution to discover, if possible, the genuine doctrines
and

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and precepts of God and of Christ, in their full evidence and extent; and by these to try all their former opinions, and all the doctrines and commandments of men. To reject whatever they find contrary to their divine rule, or not warranted by it; and embrace whatever Christ hath revealed and enjoined; although rash and fallible men may have branded it with the names of error and heresy. It should be the language of their hearts, "We will hear what the Lord says, we will receive and obey his instructions and his alone."

Some persons having learned from their Catechisms or Ministers to affix this sense to the words *election of God*, his eternal purpose to make some men happy for ever, without any regard had in forming this purpose to their temper and actions in time; and to the word *reprobation*, this meaning, an eternal and unalterable purpose of God to make the far greater part of men wretched for ever, merely because he will. And having conceited themselves to be elected, they look into the Scriptures with a fixed resolution to find in them proofs of this blasphemous and immoral doctrine, in its consequences destructive of all religion. They find the words *elect* and *reprobate* in the New Testament, and without carefully examining whether our Lord or his apostles use them in this sense, the contrary

contrary to which would be manifest, if they impartially examined the context; they determine to retain these notions against the clearest deductions of reason, and the general tenour of revelation. How much more wisely would they act, did they reflect, that their fondest wishes and most positive decisions cannot alter the infinitely wise, righteous, and merciful councils of God, or render them indeed the objects of his unchangeable favour. And that if, presuming on these notions, they neglect to practise what God has plainly required, as conditions of our being eternally blessed, they will render their final destruction more wretched, falling into it from high hopes, and awaking from their dream of Heaven amidst the miseries of the damned.

They therefore who would search the Scriptures, so as to learn from them the way to everlasting life, must be heartily desirous to find their true meaning, and honestly determined to receive and obey it. This will qualify them to discover it, according to the promise of our Lord, *John vii. 17, If any man be willing to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* Especially, if he add the observance of this last direction.

8. Of praying unto God, with humility and earnestness, that he would lead him into all necessary truth. *Shew me thy way, O Lord,*

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O Lord, said David, *Psal. xxv. 4, teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. If any man want wisdom, says St. James, i. 5, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.* And we are informed in the *Acts, ix. 11*, that in answer to *Saul's* humble prayer, *Ananias* was sent by our Lord, to instruct him fully in the doctrine of salvation. And he promised the instruction of the Spirit, under whose influence the holy Scriptures were written, unto them that ask him. *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find. Luke xi. 9.*—It is a proper acknowledgment of our proneness to mistake, and our want of the divine guidance, and of the goodness of our heavenly Father, to pray humbly for his influences and conduct. And praying with humility and earnestness, disposes us, by a natural influence, for the discovery of divine truths, and qualifies us, according to the promise of God, to receive illumination from him. It preserves on the mind a conviction of the importance of our inquiries, that they are the doctrines and precepts of God after which we are inquiring, that our main happiness is on our discovering and conforming ourselves to the divine will; and that he will be displeased with those who sacrifice his truths

truths and the observance of his laws to any prejudices, persons, or interests. It encourages also our diligent and constant application, by the hope of success under the direction and blessing of God.

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Christians should therefore begin their serious reading and study of the holy Scriptures with earnest prayer to God, that he would preserve them from being influenced by any corrupt passion or prejudice, and keep their minds open to evidence; and assist them to discover, in his Scriptures, and dispose them heartily to embrace, whatever is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness*; and for making them *perfect in every good work*. And that according to St. Paul's request for the *Philippians*, i. 9; *They may abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that they may approve the things which are excellent, and may be sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ*.

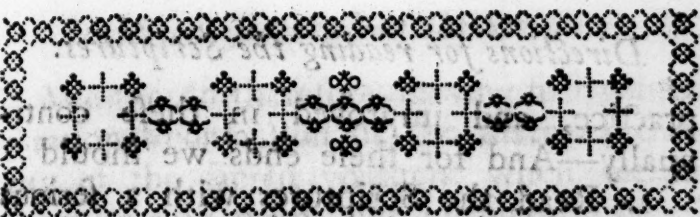
To these directions the following may be added—that as to the meaning of obscure and difficult passages, persons should consult the learned, pious, and judicious, whether ministers or others, and make the best use of their aid—and that they should endeavour to improve in the love and practice of all virtue and piety, as will peculiarly dispose the mind to relish religious

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truths,

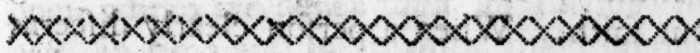
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truths, to receive, and retain them. It may be sufficient just to have mentioned these. The preceding directions diligently and faithfully observed, will, with the divine blessing, qualify us to learn from the Scriptures the certain path to everlasting life. We say diligently and faithfully observed, for to read the Scriptures seldom and carelessly, will not answer a salutary purpose. If we would be blessed, we must, according to David, Psalm i. 1, — *delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate therein day and night. Then we shall be like trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruits in their season. Our leaves also shall not wither, and whatsoever we do shall prosper.* We shall then be disposed to follow the second sort of directions, necessary to be observed, if we would answer the great purposes of Scripture-knowledge, and be determined to an answerable practice—These I shall recommend in the next Discourse.



SERMON VIII.

Directions for so reading the Scriptures, as to be improved in Piety and Goodness.



JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them, ye think ye have eternal Life; and they testify of me.

HAVING offered to your thoughts such directions to be observed, in reading the holy Scriptures, as will facilitate the discovery of their real meaning—I would

II. Recommend to your observance such as will assist us in attaining the great purposes of Scripture-knowledge, our being formed to a correspondent temper and

M 2 practice,

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practice, and improved in these continually—And for these ends we should

1. Read the Scriptures with a serious and firm conviction of their divine authority, and of the great importance of the truths which they contain. In order to this, we must become well acquainted with the principal arguments which prove the truth of Christianity, and the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures; reading carefully what hath been judiciously written on this subject, and hearing with attention what is offered by the Christian Ministry, for increasing and establishing our faith. When a person clearly discerns the proofs of our Saviour's divine authority, and is by good reasons persuaded that God himself speaks to him, in the Scriptures, the precepts, encouragements, and motives which they contain, will enter with much greater force into his heart, and have a more powerful influence on his temper and conduct, than on a person, who, having never satisfied himself of the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, does rather not disbelieve, than properly believe them. The apostle, mentioning some who received no advantage from the divine word, gives this account of it, *the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them who heard it.*

Heb.
iv. 2.

We

We should therefore, having first gained a rational conviction of the divine authority of the sacred writings, when we sit down to read them, put ourselves in mind that we are about to read, not the opinions, counsels, or commands of fallible men, but revelations from a God of unerring wisdom, infallible truth, and unbounded benevolence; who therefore will not and cannot deceive us—and of the God also to whom we owe our beings, and all our powers of action and objects of enjoyment; and unto whom therefore we owe intire obedience — and of the God also upon whom we depend for all our happiness, in time and to eternity. We should also consider, that in the Scriptures God hath given us instructions, commands, and promises, not merely relative to this short life, and its comparatively little interests, but what he therein communicates concerns our highest perfection, and our happiness for everlasting ages; that the word which we read will judge us at the last day; and that, according as we have conformed to its precepts, regarded its threatenings, and embraced its encouragements, or the contrary, we shall be blessed for ever, or be doomed to everlasting destruction.

John
xii. 48.

Did we frequently read the Scriptures under this serious conviction of their di-

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vine authority and infinite importance, they would have a great and happy influence on our temper and conversation. The threatenings of everlasting destruction to the intemperate, the lewd, the unrighteous; to slanderers, liars, and the forgetful of God, would secure the innocent against the contagion of these vices, and rouse the guilty to cleanse themselves immediately from these fatal diseases. The commands enjoining daily fervent supplications and thanksgivings, steadfast integrity, open truth, generous benevolence, and compassion, amiable mildness, noble moderation, in regard to this world, and a zealous constancy in preparing ourselves for the blessedness of a better; together with the promises made by God of his peculiar guidance, favour, and blessing to persons of these characters, while in their state of probation, and of his distinguishing them by glory and felicity in the everlasting state, according to their eminence in these good dispositions.

These precepts and promises would determine us, with continued attention, cheerfulness, and diligence, to cultivate these dispositions. They would not suffer us to be at ease, till upon good grounds we could say, “these promises belong to me; I am
“among those whom God approves, and
“will make blessed for ever; for I am, ac-
“cording

“ cording to the demands of his word, fin- SERMON
 “ cerely and prevailingly pious, honest, VIII.
 “ true, charitable, meek, and heavenly.”
 “ The Scriptures which require these dis-
 “ positions, and promise these blessings to
 “ the persons possess of them, are the
 “ commands and promises of a God infi-
 “ nitely wise, powerful, and good ; none
 “ of whose words will fall to the ground,
 “ nor can any of his promises fail. I will
 “ therefore *be steadfast, immoveable, always* 1 Cor.
 “ *abounding in the work of the Lord ; since* xv. 58.
 “ *I know that my labour in the Lord will*
 “ *not be in vain.*” This belief and con-
 viction will produce,

2. An hearty subjection to the authority of God, and a firm determination to follow his instructions, and obey his commands, which is a disposition, that should always attend our reading the sacred Scriptures. When we read the writings of the best moralists and philosophers, we discover evident marks of human fallibility, and these weaken the authority of what they justly recommend ; and should they, with a good degree of evidence, prove, that a particular disposition or practice are reasonable and amiable, yet, if we do not take in the authority of God, as enforcing the precepts of right reason, and his sanctions of future rewards and punishments, we might flatter ourselves that we should find our account

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in deviating, on particular occasions, from the rules of reason and virtue, for gratifying a favourite passion, or serving a considerable interest. But if God, our Creator, Governor, and Judge, enjoin us to practise such virtues, or forbid us such vices, it is too evident, to admit a doubt, that there is not any pleasure or interest which can make us amends for losing his favour, which includes all proper good for this life, and compleat felicity for eternity; or which can support us under those effects of his displeasure, that will certainly fall upon the disobedient, in the final state of retribution. Nor can any pleasure or advantage to be gained by sinful compliances, appear considerable enough, to excuse the guilt of ingratitude and disobedience to a God, unto whom we are so greatly obliged.

We should therefore often begin our reading the sacred writings with putting ourselves in mind, that the commands and instructions, which we are about to read, are not the instructions and commands of men, but of God our maker; *in whose hand are our breath and life, and whose are all our ways*: whose wisdom and kindness will give the best rules to his creatures, his children; whose all-seeing eye is ever observant of our hearts and of our actions; and who, having been at so great an expence of miracles and revelations, and
even

even sent his own Son from Heaven to teach mankind their duty, cannot be in-
different whether we attend and obey, or neglect and disobey, his will; who will certainly judge the world in righteousness, and make us compleatly blessed, or beyond recovery wretched, according as we have been obedient or disobedient to his word. *We will therefore hear what God the Lord says, and will be obedient.* Although his precepts may contradict a favourite passion, or stop up our way to a considerable gain, we will adhere to his precepts; determined to derive our most valued pleasures from the testimony of a good conscience, and the smiles of an approving God; and to prefer an interest in his favour, and a firm title to eternal blessedness, before the whole world. *For the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them who fear him; who keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them.* He will make all things to work together for good unto them who love God; and render glory, honour, and immortality unto them, who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, have sought these. And we must therefore resolve to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world; as the gospel of Christ commands, that the infinite blessedness which it promises may become ours.

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Exod.
xix. 8.

Psalms
ciii. 17.

Rom.
viii. 28.

ii. 7.

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VIII.Rev.
xx. 12.

3. We should read the holy Scriptures with self-application, and with a strong concern to be instructed in our whole duty, and excited to correct our mistakes, reform our faults, and advance towards perfection, in all virtuous practice and genuine piety. We should not read merely to gratify our curiosity; as to important truths and facts, to increase our knowledge, and qualify ourselves to determine with good assurance amidst the variety of opinions, what is true, and what is false, although these are worthy ends; but with a serious and impartial concern to discover also, by their light, what is yet wrong in our temper and conduct, what defects must be supplied, and how we must think and act in every relation of life; if we would become fully approved by God and blessed for ever. In the account of the last judgment given us by St. *John*, several books are represented as opened and consulted, and according to these, men's everlasting states are determined. Of these, one is the holy Scripture, according to the declarations and commands of which all Christians will be judged. How does it then concern us all to discover in time, and to reform whatever in our temper and conduct this sacred book will then condemn, that we may not be sentenced by it to everlasting destruction; and to learn

learn whatever it requires, that having practised it, we may possess for ever the blessedness which it promises!

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Are we reading for instance the fifth chapter of St. *Matthew's* gospel, wherein our Lord pronounces a blessedness on the *poor in spirit*; and declares that *theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*? We should seriously reflect—"Am I of an humble and teachable disposition; indifferent to the wealth and show of life, in comparison of my concern for the knowledge of divine truths, and the acquisition of a divine temper, and of the heavenly blessedness? Or does pride shut out instruction and improvement; or the love of riches make me more concerned to be rich in this world, than rich towards God? Jesus our Lord, who delivered this precept, will judge the Christian world according to it; and distribute final happiness to the *poor in spirit*, and to them alone; let me therefore in time cultivate this temper, that I may be prepared for the blessedness."

Mr. BENNET's *Christian Oratory* will supply the pious with various instances of reading the Scriptures after this manner; and to him I would refer you, and only add—That in the *morning*, before we enter upon action, it will be greatly profitable to read seriously the Scriptures, as instructions

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instructions and commands from God, to which we resolve to conform our tempers and actions throughout the *day*. And in the *evening* to read them and compare with them impartially our several dispositions and actions; that we may discover wherein we have been deficient, and by repentance and amendment obtain mercy from God, avoid the condemnation of the last day, and be excited and encouraged to go on unto perfection.

4. Would we make our reading the holy Scriptures most successful, for improving our hearts and regulating our conduct, we should principally and most frequently read the practical and devotional parts of Scripture. Such are the *Psalms*, the *Proverbs*, and parts of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament; and the *Gospels*, the *Acts*, the *Epistles* of St. Peter, St. John, and St. James; and those parts of St. Paul's *Epistles*, wherein he more expressly delivers rules for the regulation of our temper and conduct.

The historical parts of the Old Testament afford indeed a variety of useful instructions; and it will be found very useful and even necessary to read these, not only to gain the instructions, which they are immediately fitted to yield, but in order to our perusing also with more understanding and improvement those parts of Scripture

ture which are more intirely practical. But this I mean, that our most frequent reading should be of those parts of Scripture which are fullest of instructions for the right conduct of life, and of encouragements to habitual devotion, generous and active benevolence, firm integrity, constant moderation of our passions, with regard to things present and temporal, and a zealous prosecution of everlasting blessedness.

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If we peruse most of the *Psalms*, with attention and judgment, we shall feel our minds raised to an high veneration of the Deity, or warmed and enlarged by love and gratitude to the liberal Author of all good, or melted to an ingenuous repentance; or else comforted and relieved under the afflictions of life, and formed to a chearful trust in God and resignation to him; or we shall be animated to frame our tempers and lives by the amiable delineations of piety and goodness which we find in them. The *Proverbs* of SOLOMON furnish rules of daily use, and counsels of prudence, for avoiding the worst evils of life, and securing the most valuable blessings. And the history, sermons, and conversations of our divine Master, and of his apostles, exhibit to our view, piety and virtue, adorned with simple, yet most attractive beauty, and exalted to perfection; irresistible

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irresistible motives to imitate them, and the most awful dissuatives from all sin and disobedience; with the most precious promises to support our faith and animate our obedience; and such bright prospects of immortality, as are sufficient to render us superior to the temptations of the world, the difficulties of the christian life, and the dread of death.

In short, if we would be assisted in selecting the most useful parts of Scripture for our daily reading, and in making a judicious and practical improvement of what we read, *OSTERVALD'S Summary* of the several books and chapters, and his practical reflections, contain excellent helps for the generality of Christians; and I heartily recommend these to you.

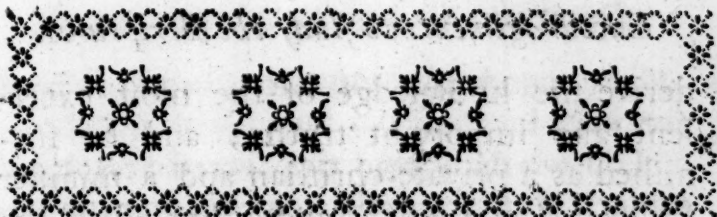
5. Finally—Would we read the sacred Scriptures, so as to be greatly improved by them in piety and goodness, we should read them under a serious conviction of a righteous judgment, and an awful eternity. But a few years more, and we must all of us enter our final and everlasting state, in which the dearest pleasures and most valued interests of this world will avail nothing to our happiness. Not any thing will be found of lasting advantage, besides a temper formed on the divine precepts and encouragements of the gospel; and the conscience of a life spent in the practice of the

the duties it requires; in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God; and thus preparing our spirits to be blessed in the perfection of knowledge, goodness, friendship, and devotion. We must soon be examined as to our conformity to these laws which we acknowledge to be divine. And if having known our Lord's will we have not done it, we shall be beaten with many stripes. Better would it have been for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than knowing it, to have disobeyed the truth, and obeyed unrighteousness; since indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, followed with eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, will be the portion of all such. But as we have known the will of God, happy shall we be if we have done it. We shall have a right to the tree of life, and enter through the gates of pearl, into the heavenly city. He who looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work; shall be blessed in his deed. And O how blessed, when fully approved by God, and by the Redeemer, applauded by angels, and admitted into their society and friendship, and established in rectitude and happiness for eternity; above the influence of sickness, pain, folly, sin, and death, and assured of continually advancing in knowledge,

James
1. 25.

ledge, goodness, devotion, and felicity,
for ever !

Did we daily read the sacred Scriptures, under a due impression of these infinitely important realities, every precept and prohibition would come with a divine energy upon our consciences, and against all the temptations of the world, determine us to be obedient. Not one good example they set before us would be disregarded, but we should endeavour to resemble it in devotion, purity, justice, or beneficence, as we hoped hereafter to resemble the person thus exemplary in happiness. Every promise of Scripture would have its proper influence, to animate our progress in piety and virtue ; and we should experience the truth of what an inspired apostle declared, that *the Scriptures are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness ; able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ ; and to render the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.* By conversing with God in his word, we should become meet to dwell with him, and to enjoy the perfection of holiness and felicity for ever in Heaven.



S E R M O N IX.

The chief Encouragements to study
the holy Scriptures represented.



2 T I M O T H Y iii. 15, 16.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, and instruction in righteous-
ness; that the man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

I N these words St. Paul encour-
ages *Timothy* to continue in the
study of the holy Scriptures of
the *Old Testament*, adding to
them the belief and study of the doc-
trines and revelations of the *New*. And
he assures him, that from both he might
derive

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derive the knowledge of the most excellent and important truths; and be furnished as a private christian and a minister for every good work, and animated to the practice. In some preceding discourses I have exhorted you to search the holy Scriptures. That the exhortation may prove effectual, I would now, as an illustration of this advantageous character of them, given by the apostle, set before you the principal encouragements to this sacred study, and advantages which may be derived from it.

And to determine you to the serious and constant study of these sacred writings be pleased to consider,

1. The Author of them. They contain instructions communicated to us by God, a Being of unerring wisdom, infallible truth, and consummate and everlasting benevolence, and our supreme disposer; on whom we wholly depend for happiness in this life and in eternity. The inspired king *David* often styles them the *word of God*. The prophets introduce their revelations with *thus saith the Lord*. Jesus the Son of God came from the bosom of the Father to declare his will to mankind. The word preached by the apostles was *not the word of men, but of God*. And in the text the apostle dignifies the Scripture with the character of θεοπνευστος *divinely inspired*. And the God of truth abundantly confirmed

2 Sam.
xxiii. 1, 2.
Psalm
cxix.

firmed the divine commission which the prophets, Jesus, and his apostles claimed, by numerous miracles, signs, and wonders, and gifts of the holy Spirit. For he enabled them to give health to the sick, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleanness to the leprous, and life to the dead, by a word. Miracles are the great seal of Heaven, and it is blasphemy to suppose, that a God of truth would affix it to forgery and lies. Whatever therefore the holy Scriptures teach us, in the name of God, we may be assured was revealed by him. And what an encouragement is this to attend unto the instructions of revelation, that they are derived from God, and contain pure truth?

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Heb.
ii. 4.

When we read the writings of the wisest and best men unguided by the divine Spirit, we find a mixture of error with truth, and have often uncertain opinions, and doubtful conjectures concerning matters of great importance offered to us instead of genuine truth and certainty: whereas when we study the Scriptures we have this advantage, that whenever we discover their real meaning; which with an honest diligence we may do, in all matters of importance to us; we then discover infallible truth; whether in relation to things past or future, to our duty or our happiness, in this life and in a future. For Jehovah is a God of truth, his understanding is infinite, he is

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present every where, and he knows all things? he cannot therefore be deceived; and he is too just and good to deceive his creatures. And with regard to whatever he promises or threatens, having almighty power at command to make it good, none of his declarations, promises, or threatenings can fall to the ground.

How desirable, Sirs, is it, amidst the uncertainty of opinions, the doubts and darkness, and errors which encompass us, to have an unerring guide to conduct us in the paths of duty and happiness, and certain truth on which to found our expectations and hopes for futurity and eternity! The famous SELDEN, one of the most eminent philosophers and most learned men of his time, who had taken a diligent survey of antiquity, and what knowledge was considerable among Jews, Heathens, and Christians, and who had read as much perhaps as any man ever read, towards the end of his days declared to *Archbishop Usher*—"That notwithstanding he had
 "been so laborious in his inquiries and
 "curious in his collections, and had pos-
 "sessed himself of a treasure of books, and
 "manuscripts, upon all ancient subjects,
 "yet he could rest his soul on none, save
 "the *Scriptures*. And above all, that pas-
 "sage gave him most satisfaction; as com-
 "prising the nature, end, and reward of
 "true

Tit.
ii. 11.

“ true religion. *The grace of God, which* SERMON
 “ *bringeth salvation to all men, hath ap-* IX.
 “ *peared, teaching us, that denying ungod-*
 “ *liness, and worldly lusts, we should live so-*
 “ *berly, righteously, and godly in this pre-*
 “ *sent world; looking for that blessed hope,*
 “ *and the glorious appearing of the great*
 “ *God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ;*
 “ *who gave himself for us, that he might*
 “ *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify*
 “ *unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of*
 “ *good works.*”

And as from the divine word we can learn nothing but truth, so the divine wisdom and goodness assure us, that if God condescend to instruct us, it will be in truths the most necessary and important. The Creator, whose infinite wisdom formed us, certainly knows our frame, and what will, upon the whole, make us happy; and the essential benevolence of our heavenly Father will determine him to direct his children, how they may attain that noble and lasting felicity; which, by the powers and capacities of their intelligent and immortal spirits, he hath formed them to enjoy. Other instructors may mean well, and wish and intend our happiness, but may, through ignorance or mistake, lead us to mischief and ruin; but he who consults and who follows the directions given by an infinitely wise and good God, in his revelation, may

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be well assured that he is in the way to the highest happiness, which his nature can capacitate him to enjoy.

Finally ; the sacred Scriptures contain the revelations of that God, who not only knows what is best for us, and how we may certainly attain to truth and happiness, but who is also the giver of happiness, and on whom we depend as our governor and judge for this life and for all the following ages of eternity. If we are at all happy here, God must give us the powers and objects of enjoyment, assist us to use them aright, and guide and preserve us in a right course. *In his hand are our breath and life, and his are all our ways.*

Dan.
v. 24.

And if we are happy in the next, the everlasting state, it must be from his favour, rewarding a faithful obedience to his will ; who hath determined to judge all according to their works, to punish the wicked with *everlasting destruction, and to render glory, honour, and immortality unto those who patiently continue in well doing.* What then should we study with equal concern and diligence, as the will of God ; on whom we entirely depend for time and for eternity ; and who if we honestly search out his will, and diligently conform to it, will cause us to possess true contentment here, and compleat blessedness in eternity ? With reason therefore a great statesman, Sir

CHRISTO-

CHRISTOPHER HATTON, a little before his death, advised his relations to be serious in searching after the will of God in his holy word. For said he, "It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledge to understand the laws of the land, and the customs of a man's country; how much more to know the statutes of Heaven, and the laws of eternity; those immutable and eternal laws of righteousness and equity! To know the will and pleasure of the great monarch and universal king. *I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandments, O Jehovah, are exceeding broad.* With whatever other knowledge a man may be endowed, could he by a vast and imperious mind, and a heart, as large as the sand upon the sea-shore, command all the knowledge of art and nature, of words and things; and yet not know the author of his being and the preserver of his life, his sovereign and his judge, his surest refuge in trouble, his best friend or worst enemy, the support of his life and the hope of his death, his future happiness and his portion for ever; he doth but go down to Hell with a great deal of wisdom." Thus this great statesman, after having tried all things, recommended the study

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Eccl.
xii. 13.

and practice of the word of God. Mr. * LOCKE also, justly esteemed one of the greatest masters of reason and freedom of thought, at the close of his life, thus advised a friend. "Study the holy Scriptures, especially the New Testament; therein are contained the *words of eternal life*. It hath God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter." And thus a wiser still, *Solomon*, declared when in a like situation. *To fear God and keep his commandments*, in order to which it is necessary that we study them, *is the whole of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing; whether it have been good or evil.* This leads our thoughts to another motive, to the study of the Scriptures:

2. The nature, variety, and importance of the truths in which they instruct us, and of which they infallibly assure us. It would imploy several discourses were I to attempt doing justice to this head; I must content myself with hinting a few of the principal truths, the full discovery and assurance of which we owe to the holy Scriptures.

1. The unity and perfections of God are truths of the most excellent and im-

* See his *Posthumous Works*, p. 344.

portant kind ; for an easy and full discovery of which we are indebted to the holy Scriptures. It is granted, that the reason of men, honestly and carefully imployed on these subjects, might discover these truths, after long and laborious inquiries. *The invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, might be clearly seen from the creation of the world ; being understood by the things which are made.* So that in all ages *they were without excuse, who said there was no God ; or who glorified him not as God.* Yet is it also certain, that a merciful God did not leave mankind to find out these truths by long and laborious inquiries ; but graciously revealed them to the first pair, and to their immediate descendants, that they might thus be diffused through all successive generations. It is also a fact well proved, that when the negligence of mankind had lost these divine discoveries, and reason and philosophy attempted to repair the loss ; that in most nations they failed of doing it. *Who professing to be wise became foolish, and changed the glory of an incorruptible God, into an image made like unto corruptible man ; and birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.*

Instead of one God and Father of all, almighty, infinitely wise, righteous and good, who was to be worshiped in spirit
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Rom. i.
20.

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and in truth; and to be pleased by veneration, gratitude, love, and trust in his mercy, and by an imitation of his benignity; they worshiped *demons*, or the souls of dead men, who were of like passions with themselves; and these they endeavoured to please by costly sacrifices, pompous ceremonies, low flatteries, and an imitation of their vices; by lewd and cruel superstitions. Of this kind was the established religion every where, excepting among those who were favoured with the light of revelation. Nor was it the illiterate and unthinking vulgar alone, who were thus erroneous, uncertain, and corrupted, as to the most important articles of religious knowledge. CICERO's treatise of the *Nature of the Gods*, written by one of the greatest geniuses and most learned men in the world, at a time also when philosophy was carried to its highest improvement, shows the wretched uncertainty under which they still laboured. They were able to discover rather what was to be rejected, than what was to be received and depended upon as true. Whereas the unlearned few, who were instructed by revelation, knew, that instead of *gods many and lords many, there is but One God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord, or one Mediator, his Son Jesus Christ. That Jehovah is one Lord,* the

the almighty God, from everlasting to everlasting the same. That his understanding is infinite, that he filleth heaven and earth with his presence, is righteous and loveth righteousness, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.

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These clear doctrines of revelation approve themselves to the reason of every considerate person, and are readily received, and heartily acquiesced in; and they deliver us from that anxious uneasiness, which would possess every serious mind, while in uncertainty, as to the great object of worship; and from all the immoral influence of a corrupting superstition. They strongly dispose persons also to that veneration, gratitude, trust, and hope in God, which yield the most valuable satisfactions, excite to all righteousness and goodness, thus advance the perfection of the human mind, and prepare it to become highly blessed in a future state of existence. *This is life eternal, to know the only true God.* And this should recommend to all the study of the Scriptures; that with great clearness and certainty, and without a mixture of error, they teach us this knowledge; and thus dispose us to know and practise, what is really pleasing to God, and will qualify

us

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us to be made happy by him, in time and for eternity.

2. Again ; the *origin of the world* is another great and interesting truth in which the Scriptures instruct us. Although human reason diligently cultivated, and impartially observing the visible creation, might clearly discover, that it's dead and unactive materials must at first be formed, into all the grandeur, beauty, variety, and use, by a most wise, powerful, and beneficent mind ; and that the same mind must continually direct and move these infinitely various particles, all in themselves void of life, power, and motion ; in order to produce and preserve the beauty, utility, and fruitfulness of the creation ; and to form plants and trees, fruits, and grain, and much more living creatures without number—Although human reason might have discovered this, yet in fact the most sagacious philosophers, undirected by revelation, overlooked these evident and most important truths, and in the name of wisdom talked the grossest folly. They pretended to account for all this beauty, grandeur, life, and utility by the causality of blundering chance, or an unintelligent necessity ; or by the action of fire, water, and air ; in themselves wholly unactive without the energy and guidance of an alwise and almighty mind.

All

All this darkness and absurdity revelation banishes by this plain, rational, and most desirable discovery: *That in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*: That when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, God said, *Let there be light, and there was light*; and dividea be light from the darkness: That the same almighty mind raised the firmament to support the clouds, and gathering the waters of the deep into one place, caused the dry land to appear: That he said, *Let the earth bring forth grass, and herbs yielding seed, and the fruit-tree, whose seed is in itself, and it was so*: That the same God made the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night, and made the stars also; which by most nations have been vainly worshiped as gods: And that having formed the earth capable of supporting innumerable living creatures, he then caused them to live, birds, fishes, beasts, and reptiles, and last of all, *man* to be the lord of this lower creation, to enjoy his bounties, and to love, praise, and resemble his goodness; and all this in *six days*. The first chapter of *Genesis* contains more noble, satisfying and important truths with relation to the origin of the world, than all the volumes written by philosophers of all ages, unenlightened by revelation. And how desirable these discoveries!

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Genesis
i. 1.

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veries ! That the world which we inhabit is the production of God, of a Being posselt of almighty power, all-comprehensive wisdom, and unbounded benevolence ; on whose unchangeable perfections we may always cheerfully depend, in a course of grateful piety and virtuous obedience ; and who, having formed us capable of nobler enjoyments, than the present state can yield us, we with reason conclude, hath designed us for another state wherein we shall possess them, if we heartily comply with his design. How worthy then our serious study these Scriptures, which plainly teach us this great and desirable truth !

3. The creation of man in the image of God, and the dignity and large expectations of the human soul, as immediately inspired into this animal body by God, and his offspring, are other interesting truths discovered by the sacred Scriptures, which should recommend to us the serious study of them *. The account given of the origin of man, by many, who past amongst the antient heathen for wise men, was this.
 “ That mankind were raised out of the
 “ mud, like mushrooms ; merely by the
 “ sun’s heat. That they got their rational spirits no one knew whence ; perished most of them as soon as formed ;

* Vid. Lucret. L. v. l. 800. Horat. Sat. L. i. Sat. 3. l. 99. &c.

“ being

“ being neither the productions nor the
“ care of any intelligent and kind parent,
“ nor made for any end. That the har-
“ dieft of this mushroom-breed fubfifted
“ on berries and acorns, and ran about
“ like their brute brethren on all fours,
“ and with their claws and teeth fought
“ with them for their food; until at laft,
“ no man knows how long firft, they
“ learned to walk upright and to know
“ that they were rational. They then be-
“ came focial and civilized, made a fhift
“ to pafs through life tolerably; and then
“ died without knowing what became of
“ them; and whether their fouls perifted
“ in death or furvived their bodies.”

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What an abfurd, as well as degrading and comfortlefs account this of the origin and nature of man!

But the Scriptures, the ftudy of which I recommend, inform us, what reason alfo demonstrates true, from a due confideration of the wonderful fkill and kindnefs vifible in the frame of our bodies, and in the various and excellent powers of our minds—that we are the works of God, infinitely wife, powerful, and benevolent, and in a peculiar fenfe his children—that though the body of man, like the bodies of other animals, was formed out of the duft, yet he was diftinguifhed from them by deriving his fpirit from the *infpiration* of the

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Genesis
ii. 27.
Psalm
viii. 6.

Creator. A phrase which not only teaches us that Jehovah is our creator, but suggests also the peculiar excellence of the human spirit, as of a nature akin to divine; resembling the Deity in intelligence, liberty, and a capacity of becoming happy in the satisfactions of truth, rectitude, goodness, and divine love. Agreeably to this we are further taught that *God made man, in his own image*, and to *have dominion over the works of his hands* in this lower world. That instead of forming him an helpless infant, and leaving him a prey to hunger, violence, and death, he formed him with his faculties of body and of mind in their strength, instructed him in what was necessary to his support, and to his right conduct and happiness; and placed him in a paradise, furnished with every thing convenient and agreeable. Here he was to imploy himself in cultivating a delicious garden, in the intercourses of a tender friendship with *Eve*, and of affection with their common offspring; in meditating on the works of the Creator, and worshiping before his visible glory. And after a life of obedience, throughout which he would have been an intire stranger to pain, want, evil, and death, he would most probably have been translated to the heavenly paradise, and to a blessedness angelical and immortal.

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This is an account of the original of mankind, which excites us to act up to our natural dignity; and to be as much above the merely animal life in our pursuits and enjoyments, as the human nature excels the brutal—an account which assures us, that the wisest and best of Beings formed us with the kindest intentions; and which encourages us, if we prove grateful and obedient, to expect a fulness of bliss in the heavenly paradise; since, for the best reasons, he has been pleased, by an alteration introduced into the frame of our bodies, and of the earth, for restraining and punishing sin, to make it vain for us to expect compleat happiness in the present state.

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These are encouraging truths, which the Mosaic account of the formation of man; illustrated by the comments of Christ and his apostles, gives us. Truths well worthy our daily and delightful meditation.

4. The happiness of man in society hath a great dependance on a tender and constant friendship between married persons; and on their united and continued endeavours to educate their children in the fear and love of God, and in the exercise of every kind and generous affection. To determine persons therefore to seek their happiness, in this course, the holy Scripture informs us, that our Creator, who

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best knows what is good for his creatures, formed the woman out of a part of the man, and appointed but one woman for one man; and this, that *men might love their wives as themselves*, live in an indissoluble union, and be thus engaged to make the best of a state, which must last for life—that domestic peace might not be broken by rivalships, jealousies, and contending interests—and finally, that a merely brutal inclination, gratified and inflamed by variety, might not usurp the place of a generous and tender friendship, and parental love; an affection which in it's exercise, disinterestedly pursuing the good of our children, forms us to some resemblance of the infinitely benevolent Father of spirits.

5. The entrance of evil into the world, natural and moral, the progress and continuance of it until its total abolition, at the final renovation of all things; are represented in a manner fitted to make men very cautious of sinning, to encourage the sincerely good in bearing well the afflictions, and steddily resisting the temptations of life; and to guard the serious and pious against those perplexing difficulties, which have discouraged and confounded men, unenlightened by revelation, when they have considered the present state of things, and endeavoured to reconcile it with the wisdom, and benevolence of a governing God.

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By the Scriptures we are taught, that *God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living*—that sufferings and death were introduced by wilful disobedience, and are permitted to continue, purely for correcting, restraining, and finally extirpating wickedness—that with regard to the sincerely pious and virtuous, affliction, sickness, pain, and death, by exercising, approving, and heightening their piety and virtue, and turning their views more entirely from earth to heaven, shall thus *work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*: which will render them *light* and but *for a moment* in comparision—that the evil spirit, who introduced sin and death, is already in part punished by the Almighty, is under his constant controul, and shall at the best time have his influence and dominion intirely destroyed; and that the obedience unto death of Jesus Christ, the promised *seed of the woman*, shall be rewarded with a power of restoring all mankind to life, and of raising all the sincerely obedient and virtuous unto immortal happiness. That *as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*, subjected to death, the punishment of sin, and thus treated as sinners; *so by one man's obedience many shall be made righteous*, restored to life, the reward of righteousness. That *as in Adam all die,*

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in Christ all shall be made alive; and where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. And all the sincerely though imperfectly virtuous and holy, such is the abundance of the divine grace, shall reign in life, through one, Jesus Christ.

Thus hath *Moses* in two short chapters *Genesis* ii. and iii. and *Paul* commenting on these in another short chapter, *Romans* v. 3. given more light into this important and difficult inquiry, than all the philosophers of antiquity. What a motive this to the careful study of the sacred writings, when to this we can add—that these and the several other important discoveries mentioned, may be learned from a few pages of the holy Scripture. Does not *St. Paul* then justly characterise them, as profitable for doctrine, and instruction in righteousness, and able to make us wise to salvation, through faith in *Christ Jesus*? I add but one instance more from the beginning of *Genesis*.

6. As it is natural to be inquisitive from whence we derive our original, when we enter this world; so much more, what will become of us when we leave it. As the imperfection of all mortal enjoyments, and the ill treatment which the pious and virtuous often receive here, convince them that it is vain to expect compleat happiness, or to enjoy their full reward in

this life; it must be very desirable to be assured by God, that this happiness and reward will be granted them in another state. And this we are taught, not only by the promise of a general restoration by the seed of the woman just mentioned; but by the death of *Abel* also, whom a governing God permitted to be murdered by his wicked brother, soon after he had declared a peculiar approbation of his piety. An event, which a most wise, righteous, and good governor would not have permitted, if he had not determined to reward him after death; and by this event to direct the hopes of the pious to a future state. Hopes which he farther confirmed by translating *Enoch* to heaven without dying, in reward to his eminent piety, ill treated by a degenerate age. Expectations also not a little countenanced by what *Solomon*, according to the wisdom by which God distinguished him, taught; that *when the body returns to dust, whence it was taken, the spirit returns to God, who gave it*. But for full assurance in this most important article, we are indebted to *Jesus Christ*, who expressly declares—that the souls of the penitent, and of the sincerely pious and obedient, are *immediately* after death admitted *into paradise*, being conducted thither by *angels*; to reside with the spirits of *Abraham* and all good men

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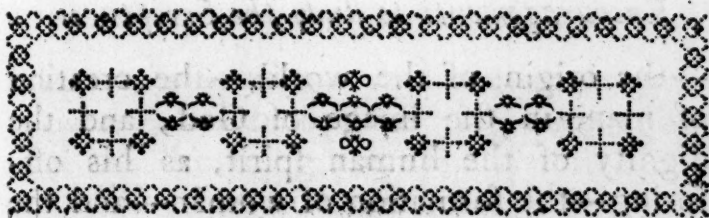
Eccl.
xiii. 7.

Luke
xvi. 22,
23, 43.

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departed ; and that at the conclusion of this world, the bodies of all the dead shall be raised, and the bodies of all the righteous to immortal life ; as an assurance of which to all men, God raised his Son *Jesus*, after a life of suffering piety and patient goodness, and a voluntary martyrdom, to glory and immortality. Thus in the Scriptures of the *Old Testament* eternal life may be found, especially by all, who receive their testimony concerning *Jesus Christ*, who explains and confirms them ; of which more hereafter.

There are many other important truths, for the discovery or confirmation of which, we are indebted to the sacred writings, and these I shall mention, as motives to the diligent study of them in a following discourse. May those now mentioned excite us to a more intimate acquaintance with them ; and may we all thus become wise to salvation !



S E R M O N X.

The chief Encouragements to study
the holy Scriptures represented.



2 TIMOTHY iii. 15, 16.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, and instruction in righteous-
ness; that the man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

 N a preceding discourse on these words, I recommended a serious and diligent perusal of the holy scriptures, on account of the many noble and interesting truths, the full discovery or assurance of which we may derive from them. Of this kind are the divine unity and perfections,

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—the origin of the world,—the creation of man, in the image of God; and the dignity of the human spirit, as his offspring—the formation of woman—and the institution of marriage—the entrance of evil, with the promise of its being totally abolished by the seed of the woman—and the hope of a future happy state.—To these important truths I would add the mention of the following.

Gen.

xviii. 25.

7. The doctrine of a moral and universal Providence—of God's continual attention to the thoughts and actions of men—of his approving the pious, the righteous, and merciful, and disapproving the wicked—and as the judge of all the earth, doing right with regard to both, in finally rewarding the one, and punishing the other.—This doctrine, the belief of which is so necessary to the supporting the practice of virtue and piety, and restraining impiety and wickedness, is either supposed or expressly taught throughout the sacred writings, which also supplies us with various striking instances of a moral providence. Of this kind was the destruction brought on the wicked inhabitants of the world by the deluge, and the saving righteous *Noah* and his family. Of this kind also was the punishing *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* with utter ruin by fire from heaven, and delivering righteous *Lot*; and such were the plagues

plagues inflicted on that obstinate tyrant *Pharaoh*, and the other *Egyptian* oppressors, and the drowning them in the Red Sea, and delivering the oppressed *Israelites*. SERMON
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The whole history of this people in their successive generations displayed the moral providence and government of God; who prospered when obedient, or suffered by invasions, diseases, famine, or captivity when they proved rebellious and wicked. This important truth was also confirmed and illustrated by the predictions of the prophets, concerning the nations bordering upon the *Israelites*, and their punctual accomplishment; and by these instances of a moral government, mankind were prepared for receiving with full assent the still more important doctrine of an universal judgment at the conclusion of this world.

When a great white throne shall be erected on the clouds, and the Son of God descend from the divine presence, in the glory of his Father, and attended with ten thousand, thousand holy angels, and seat himself on the throne of his glory. When the sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and death and Hades the dead which are with them. And all men small and great shall stand before his tribunal and be judged; every one according to his works. When all, who shall be found to have been obstinately and incurably wicked, shall be cast into a lake

Rev. xx.
11.

of

SERMON

X.

Rom. ii.

7.

of fire and brimstone; but all the righteous shall enter into life eternal; and receive glory, honour, and immortality, as the reward of their patient continuance in well-doing.

8. The doctrine of a particular providence, is another desirable and important truth, which we may learn from the holy Scriptures, and which recommends the serious study of them to all the honest and considerate. That God not only observes and approves the pious and virtuous, and will finally reward them—but that he watches over them, as the wisest and best of parents over dutiful children, to train them to perfection in goodness and happiness—that he directs and over-rules the various events of their lives, so as may best subserve their present proficiencie in virtue and piety, and their happiness in eternity—that he preserves them from every real evil, never suffers them *to be tempted above what they are able*, nor permits any affliction to befall them, which may not prove beneficial—that he chastens them, when it is necessary, *not for his pleasure, but for their profit, that they may be made partakers of his holiness—if they seek first his kingdom and righteousness, he adds other things to them; makes all things to work together for good unto them who love him; worketh in them to will and to do whatever is necessary for*

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advancing

advancing their eternal salvation ; and guides them by his counsel, until he receives them to his eternal kingdom and glory.

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These animating truths, and the manner in which Jehovah evercises this providence, by the *ministry of angels*, are particularly taught by the vision which *Jacob* saw at *Bethel*. In this there appeared to him a *ladder reaching from heaven to earth*, the glorious presence of God at the head of it, and *Angels ascending and descending*, and he received most gracious promises of protection and supply. This vision plainly signified the peculiar providence of God over the pious and good, and the favours he conferred upon them, by the ministry of angels, continually employed herein, and passing between heaven and earth to execute the gracious purposes of God towards the *heirs of salvation*. To this the Psalmist refers. *The angel of the Lord incampeth round about them who fear him, and delivereth them*; as he did *Jacob* on his return, when he feared being killed by *Esau*. This truth the histories also of *Noah*, *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Joseph*; of *Job*, of *Moses*, and of *David*, of *Jesus* and his *apostles*, exemplify and confirm to the abundant encouragement and support of the sincerely pious and righteous in all succeeding ages ; who are thus assured, that while they keep themselves in the way of their

Genesis
xxviii.
12.

Psalms
xxxiv. 7.

Genesis
xxxii.
and
xxxiii.

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X.

Phil. iv.

their duty, nothing shall really hurt them; who are thus relieved from every care, but the concern of approving themselves unto God in well doing, and may cast all their other cares upon him; and in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, make their requests known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will then keep their hearts through Jesus Christ; since his gospel assures them, that God will keep them from every evil, and preserve them unto his heavenly kingdom. This, Sirs, is a doctrine which renders contemptible all the temptations of the world; for it assures every real good to the faithful and obedient; and it places them above all the threats and terrors of the wicked, by assuring them, that none of these shall hurt them; and that *light afflictions, which are comparatively but for a moment, shall work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

Deut. x.

12.

Lev. xix.

18.

9. The excellent precepts delivered in the holy scriptures, by observing which we may gain in the present life solid satisfaction, and the divine favour, and in the life to come everlasting blessedness, should determine us diligently to read and study them. The summary of the moral law, in the *Ten Commandments*, given by *Moses*, is a proof of this. And though the circumstances of the *Israelites*, a superstitious people,

people, surrounded with idolaters, made necessary a variety of precepts relating to sacrifices, ceremonies, and the like, his summing up religion in these two commands, *to love the Lord our God, with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves*; proves the rules of religion to be rules of happiness. David in several Psalms, gives amiable descriptions of genuine piety and righteousness formed on this model. *He hath shewed thee, O man, said the prophet Micah, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* Jesus Christ approved the summary given by Moses; and recommends the love of God, and of our neighbour, by promising eternal life to those who kept these precepts. And according to St. Paul, in a place before cited, this is the great design of the gospel, and the sum of religion; *that denying all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in the present world.* Thus satisfactorily does the Christian revelation answer this important question, “ what must frail, offending, and dying creatures do to be saved.” And thus are we certified, that in cultivating the dispositions, and practising the virtues, which improve both our bodies and our minds, which make us happiest in ourselves, and
the

SERMON
X

Pf. xv:
xxiv. Ls
cxii.

Matt.
xxii. 37.

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the greatest blessings to all around us; give foretastes of the heavenly blessedness; and qualify for enjoying it in perfection, we shall be approved of God, and obtain eternal life.

And this alone is a sufficient motive to engage us in the serious study of the holy Scriptures, that they certainly direct us; how we may please God; and become blessed for ever.

10. The relief also which they give to the pains of a mind, humbled by a consciousness of guilt; and the reviving assurances of forgiveness and acceptance which they give to the penitent and sincere; are strong recommendations of the sacred writings, to creatures inconstant and often offending. None can forgive sins but God; and none authentically promise forgiveness; but persons authorised by him. The Supreme Governor can alone fix the conditions of pardon; and he hath fixed these to the great consolation of the humble and penitent; and so as to encourage and dispose the greatest sinners to repent.

Psalms
li. 17.

2 Cor.
vii. 10.

Isa. i. 16.

1 John i.

9, ii. 1.

Psalms

cxxx. 4.

The sacrifices of God which he accepts, are a broken heart and a contrite spirit; that ingenuous sorrow which worketh repentance. Cease to do evil, and learn to do well; confess and forsake your sins; and then though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall become white as snow. There is forgiveness with

with God that he may be feared. And as high as the heavens are above the earth; so great is his mercy unto them who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far will he remove their transgressions from them. For like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them who fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust. And this is a principal blessing of the covenant in Christ Jesus; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. And these are the gracious conditions of obtaining this inestimable blessing, repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; putting ourselves intirely under his instruction and guidance, and imitating his amiable example of uniform piety, generous goodness, stedfast integrity, and noble moderation, to a world which is passing away; and then looking for the mercy of God through him unto eternal life.

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X.

Psalm
ciii. 11.
&c.

Heb.
viii. 12.

No principles can give satisfaction to such imperfect creatures as mankind, especially when they are entering another state, and about to give up their account unto God, like the satisfaction which we receive from these gracious assurances in the name of God, that our sins shall be forgiven, and our defective endeavours to please him accepted and rewarded with eternal life; a
reward

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reward infinitely above the desert of a perfect obedience, during so short a season of trial as ours. It must therefore strongly recommend the Scriptures to rational persons, that they will find in them these most desirable and important truths expressly revealed.

11. The testimony given to Christ, and the abundant confirmation of our faith in his divine authority, by various predictions delivered in different ages, and punctually accomplished in him; are another recommendation of the holy Scriptures to our serious study. None but Jehovah, the great Governor of the world, can foretell events thousands of years to come, which depend on contingent causes, and accomplish them. Nor can a rational person doubt, that God sent the prophet, to confirm whose mission these predictions were delivered, and in favour of whom they were fulfilled. Nor is there any room to suppose that enthusiasm or imposture were concerned in predictions, delivered by different persons, at the distance of several ages; and the latest of them more than four hundred years prior to the birth of Christ; which all center in him: and all of which have been since his birth in the custody of inveterate enemies to his religion.

Was

Was it foretold to *Adam*, that *the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*?

SERMON
X.

With admiration and a triumph of faith we see this prediction accomplished by

Gen. iii.
15.

Jesus; born of a virgin mother, and thus peculiarly the *seed of the woman*; who by his divine religion destroyed through the known world the empire of idolatry, superstition, and vice, the empire of the *serpent*.

And who by his obedience unto death recovering immortality for mankind, and confirming his acquisition by rising himself to immortal life, *destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered those, who through the fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage*.

Rom. v.
14.

Heb.
ii. 14.

Was it promised to *Abraham* more than two thousand years after, that this great deliverer should descend from him; and that *in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed*? *Jesus Christ*, beyond dispute, the *seed of Abraham*, hath blessed all nations with that excellent religion; which forms all the genuine disciples of it to a meetness for an heavenly blessedness; and which assures them of a resurrection to an immortal life, that they may for ever possess it.

Gen.
xxii. 18.

Matt. i.

Was it promised to *Judah*, two hundred years after, that *the scepter should not depart from his seed, till Shiloh came; unto whom the gathering of the people should be*? *Jesus Christ* came just before the dissolution

Gen.
xlix. 10.

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of the Jewish state, and the scepter has been long departed from the Jews; who for seventeen hundred years have been no longer a nation, governed by their own rulers and laws.

Deut.
xviii. 5.

Did *Moses*, some hundred years after this promise, that *Jehovah* would raise up unto them, a prophet like unto him, unto whom they should hearken; and disobedience to whom would be punished with like terrible calamities, as disobedience to *Moses* had been. Jesus like *Moses* was a lawgiver, and introduced a new institute of religion; which he confirmed with more numerous miracles, than were wrought by *Moses*. Jesus had not merely occasional revelations, like the other prophets, but constant communications from God, like as *Moses*. And for rejecting and disobeying Jesus, the Jewish nation, according to his predictions, were punished with the total destruction of *Jerusalem*, their temple, and constitution, and with the slaughter of above a *million* of persons; and with a captivity and dispersion which have lasted seventeen hundred years; and which is not like to end, until, as a nation, they shall repent and submit to Jesus, as the promised Messiah.

Matt.
xxiv.

2 Sam.
vii. 12.
Psalm
ii. xvi.
xxii. cx.

Did *David* who prophesied several hundred years after *Moses*, declare, that the *Messiah* was to descend from him, and to be both a *king* and a *priest*? That he should

Should die, yet not see corruption, should have an everlasting kingdom, and be a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec? SERMON.
X.
Jesus of the lineage of David, having been crucified, rose from the dead on the third day, and saw not corruption; and proved himself exalted to the right hand of God, as a priest and king, by pouring down on his disciples the gifts of the holy spirit. AAs ii.
As a king, he broke in pieces his obstinate enemies, the unbelieving Jews; according to his express predictions; and he shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 1 Cor. xv.
Did Isaiah and Daniel, some hundreds of years after David, foretell, that the Messiah should make his life an offering for sin; that he should be cut off, but not for himself, or his own offences; that he should see a numerous seed, prolong his days, and have the pleasure of the Lord prosper in his hand, and possess an everlasting dominion? Isa. liii.
Did Daniel fix the term of four hundred and ninety years, as the period wherein these events should be accomplished? Dan. ix. 24.
At the close of this period Jesus appeared, voluntarily died, as a propitiation for the sins of the world, and introduced and confirmed that religion which contains precepts of immutable goodness, and everlasting righteousness; rose again from the dead, and had a numerous seed, converts to his religion from all parts of the earth;

Matt.
xxvi. 28.

John x.
11.

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and the city and sanctuary of his murderers have been long destroyed. No person besides Jesus Christ appeared within that period, who pretended to sustain the characters, both of a *suffering* and a *triumphant* Messiah; and the Jewish city and temple are destroyed. The Jews allow these predictions to be divine—yet they must own also that they have failed of an accomplishment, if they have not been fulfilled by our Saviour. And if Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled them, he was indeed the person he claimed to be, *Messiah*, the Son of God, and Lord of the world; of which also he will be the judge. And then all his precepts are of divine authority, his threatenings will be awfully executed in the everlasting destruction of them, *who obey not his gospel*; and his promises to the penitent, sincere, and obedient, of *full forgiveness*, of *acceptance* with God, of *divine assistance*, and *eternal life* and blessedness will be fully made good.

These with various other predictions, allowed by the *antient Jews* to relate to the Messiah, and all accomplished in our Saviour, and in him alone, we shall find in the Scriptures, which thus testify of Jesus; abundantly proving his divine mission, and adding the strongest sanction to his miracles. For miracles done in consequence of predictions, which God alone could deliver

liver and make good, must certainly be wrought by him, or by his appointment: and they are therefore the *great seal* of heaven, set to the commission and character of our Jesus. In him therefore we with reason believe, as the *Son of God*, the *Saviour and judge* of the world, and the *giver of immortality*.

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Finally, to ingage you to study the Scriptures, consider, that in them you may find *eternal life*; revealed *obscurely* in the Old Testament, but most clearly in the *New*. This, said St. *John*, is the great gospel record, *that God hath given unto us eternal life; and that this life is in his Son*. Eternal life! Not merely a state of blessedness, corresponding in degree and duration to the shortness of our time of trial, and the defectiveness of our obedience; but a state of compleat, divine and *everlasting* felicity; in which our bodies, redeemed from corruption, shall be made *glorious, spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal*; and our *spirits be made perfect* in knowledge, rectitude, friendship, devotion and every amiable quality. Wherein, we shall see God, and become like unto him; dwell in the glorious presence of the Father and the Son, enjoy bright and extensive views of the perfections and works of an infinite mind, join with angels in celebrating the divine excellencies, obeying his will and rejoicing

1 Ep.
v. 11.

1 Cor.
xv.
xiii. 9.
Heb.
xii. 22.
1 John
iii. 2.
Rev.
ii. 22.

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in his favour; shall share their friendship and resemble them; where God will *wipe all tears from our eyes, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*; and where shall be *no more pain, or death*; where *the people will all be righteous*, and where, being established in rectitude, they shall, by the unchangeable goodness and love of God, be assured of being established in blessedness for eternity.

These are truths infinitely important to frail, offending, and dying creatures, apprehensive of immortality, and capable, if God will, of living and being happy forever. In these great doctrines, all the other discoveries of revelation center, and this alone would render the Scriptures worthy of our constant study, and zealous obedience, that *in them we certainly have eternal life*; and that when this world and the fashion of it, *shall pass away, he who will do the will of God, taught in them, shall abide for ever*, where are fulness of joy and pleasures for ever.

1 Pet. i.
24.
Psalm
xvi. 11.

To these truths of great and universal importance, many others might have been added, which are both curious and useful; such as the only authentic accounts of the origin of nations, and the first peopling the earth; for the earliest heathen historians we have, lived later than *Moses* by a thousand years.—Examples of eminent

nent virtue and piety from *Enoch* to Jesus SERMON
Christ and his apostles ; with the conduct X.
of divine providence regarding them ; their
trials, temptations, blessings, and deliver-
ances.—The separation of the *Israelites*
from the idolatrous nations, that they
might preserve in the world the knowledge
of the one true God, of his perfections
and moral providence, and of the proper
method of pleasing him ; in opposition to
prevailing idolatries, and immoral and cor-
rupting superstitions.—The simplicity and
excellence of the moral precepts of *Moses* ;
the *wisdom* and *equity* of the political, and
the fitness of the ritual to preserve a peo-
ple, prone to superstition, from falling
into the pompous and wicked rites of the
nations around them ; and to prepare them
for the pure and spiritual worship of the
christian dispensation.—The noble and ex-
press declarations of the *prophets* relating to
the inefficacy of sacrifices, external purifica-
tions, and the like, without inward purity,
without a prevailing reverence and love of
God, as a most righteous and good gover-
nor, and the practice of righteousness,
goodness, mercy, and truth.—The various
predictions relating to *Israel*, and the neigh-
bouring nations, with their exact accom-
plishment.—The powerful assistances to ha-
bitual devotion, and eminent examples of
it in the *Psalms*.—The judicious rules, for

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the conduct of life, given by *Job* and *Solomon*; and finally, the gradual dawning and increase in the light, exciting to a more rational piety, unto the perfect day of the gospel dispensation.

All these various truths, and noble discoveries, which entertain, improve, and enlarge the human mind, and are admirably adapted to form it unto a rational piety and exalted virtue, a generous goodness, a constant integrity, a firm trust in God, and prevailing regard to immortality; and thus to give us the best joys of this life, and a good assurance of the compleat blessedness of heaven, and the proper temper for enjoying it; should recommend the daily and attentive study of the Scriptures to all, who value mental pleasures, and desire solid happiness here and for ever. To these instances we can add,

III. The advantageous manner, in which these interesting truths are taught in Scripture; but of this in the next discourse.

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S E R M O N XI.

The chief Encouragements to study
the holy Scriptures represented.



2 TIMOTHY iii. 15, 16.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, and instruction in righteousness;
that the man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

 N two preceding discourses I have recommended the serious and diligent study of the holy Scriptures, SERMON
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I. From the consideration of their Author,
a Being of unerring wisdom, infallible truth,
and consummate goodness; on whom also

we

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we intirely depend for happiness in this life, and to eternity.

II. From a consideration of the nature, variety, and importance of the truths, in which they instruct us, and of which they infallibly assure us. I shall now offer to your thoughts another recommendation of this study.

III. The advantageous manner in which they teach these interesting truths, adapted to convey instruction and improvement to persons of low capacities and education, as well as to those of higher, and to make them all wise unto salvation.

We may here consider both the *plainness* and the authority, with which the sacred writers teach us the most important truths.

We have the most interesting truths delivered in the holy Scriptures with all plainness. To derive the knowledge of such truths from the writings of heathen moralists and philosophers, we must come to them furnished with the knowledge of various other doctrines, difficult to be distinctly understood, and clearly proved; and of many learned philosophic phrases. Whereas *the testimonies of the Lord make wise the simple*. No such extraordinary preparation is necessary, that persons unlearned and of common capacities may derive from the Scriptures this valuable knowledge. An honest and attentive mind is the

the principal qualification requisite. With SERMON XI.
 how much plainness are we taught by *Moses*, and with what ease may we learn from him, that the world is the production of Almighty God, and that men are his creatures, made to know and love him, and to become happy in obeying him. Truths these which would require as many months of close study to derive them with clearness and certainty from the writings of the philosophers, as hours if we would learn them from *Moses*. How many volumes have been written to prove, with satisfying evidence, the immortality of our souls? With how much clearness and ease doth *Jesus Christ* teach us this great truth; whose miracles proved him a divine instructor; when he charges us *not to be afraid of men, who can only kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*; and when he assures us, that the souls of the faithful are, like the soul of *Lazarus*, after death conducted by angels to paradise. What is the duty, what the chief end and happiness of man, requires long and laborious study, if we would learn it from the principles and deductions of the philosophers. How easily may we learn this from revelation, which clearly teaches us, *to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and of our Sa-*

Matt.
x. 28.

Luke
xvi. 22.
xxiii.
43.

Tit. ii.
11.

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Rom.
ii. 5.

viour Jesus Christ; who will judge the world in righteousness; and render glory, honour, and immortality, unto those who patiently continue in well-doing.

John v.
25.

What doctrines can concern us more than these, a future, righteous, universal judgment, and everlasting retributions? And with what clearness and certainty does Jesus Christ, who by raising several dead persons to life, proved himself authorised by God, to raise all the dead at last, and to judge the whole assembled world, teach all these great truths? For thus he spake, *As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they who have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they who have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* And as a proof of the peculiar clearness, with which the holy Scriptures have taught these truths, they have never been disputed by those who receive the *New Testament*. Whereas among the philosophers, these doctrines were disputed without end.

This minds me of the other advantage in the scriptural manner of instruction, namely, the decisive authority with which the inspired authors speak. Should a man like our-

selves strongly prove the reasonableness of the various instances of moral goodness, and give good reasons to think that in the practice of these we should be accepted of God, and rewarded by him; yet as to particular instances of duty, which crossed each man's predominant inclination, we might find plausible pretences to set against his reasonings: the evidence of which also we could not clearly discern, without such an attention, as these inclinations would indispose us for giving. But if God plainly enjoins us, in the sacred Scriptures, certain duties, or forbids certain vicious practices, his authority silences all objections; and his favour or displeasure include in them so much good or evil for this life and for eternity, as outweigh every temptation to disobedience.

Who that reads attentively the XXVth chapter of St. *Matthew's* gospel, in which our Lord the judge commands us to make the best improvement of our time, and talents, and advantages for doing good, and recommends a generous compassion and bounty; expressly assuring us, that he will call us all to an account, and according as we have been faithful, diligent, and charitable, or the contrary, will say to us before angels or men—*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you; enter into life eternal. For I was hungry;*

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gry, and ye gave me meat; naked, and ye cloathed me; that is, ye did it to some of these my brethren, and I accept it, as done unto me. Or, Depart, ye cursed; into everlasting fire. For I was hungry and ye gave me no meat, naked and ye cloathed me not: and forasmuch as ye did it not to one of these my brethren, ye did it not to me. Who that seriously reads this, and believes and considers what he reads; and must not without the labour of long reasoning see it clearly to be his duty and happiness to fill life with doing good; and resolve to act accordingly; as he would be confounded before the presence of Christ the judge? The like may be applied to every other instance of duty and encouragement to obedience, — which are delivered in Scripture, with so much plainness and authority; as will give to the simple and unlearned ability and disposition for rising to degrees of goodness and blessedness far above those, which persons not thus taught of God can attain by long study and repeated efforts. And the eminent degrees of rational piety and generous goodness, to which numbers of plain and unlearned christians have attained, aided by the clear instructions and decisive authority of the sacred Scriptures, are such strong recommendations of them to our serious and constant perusal,

as render a farther enlargement on this head unnecessary.

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IV. The histories and examples recorded in the holy Scriptures, and which so admirably illustrate and enforce the precepts, are another powerful recommendation of them to our daily serious reading and meditation. It is an old observation, that while precepts merely direct and oblige, examples attract and animate. They teach us also to apply aright general rules, and remove the pretence offered against observing commands of exalted piety and goodness, that these are above our practise; by showing us these commands fulfilled by men like ourselves. The faith, and trust, and devotedness of *Abraham*; the patience of *Job*; the meekness of *Moses*; the public spirit, integrity, and disinterestedness of *Samuel*; the warm devotion of *David*, amidst the cares and pleasures of a court; the chastity and fidelity of *Joseph*; the constant piety and noble fortitude of *Daniel*, and his three companions; the genuine repentance and abundant restitution of *Zaccheus*; the piety, sincerity, and charity of *Cornelius*—these, not to name others, are examples of great efficacy, with which the holy Scriptures supply us. We see the principles which animated them; we admire the excellency to which they rose, and then desire and strive to become

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come like them : especially as the same Scriptures inform us, how acceptable they thus rendered themselves unto God; with what blessings in this life he rewarded their obedience; and with what infinitely greater blessings he will reward them in the future and everlasting state. The example of our Saviour Christ, recorded at large in the gospels, is peculiarly so amiable, instructive, and animating, as to render it needless to mention any more.

The great discouragements to a life of fervent piety and generous active beneficence are the ill treatment these often receive from the world, and the injuries and persecutions by which we see them often overwhelmed. We think it hard that they who deserve the best treatment, should be forced to endure the worst, and are apt to judge ourselves too good for such usage; and to withdraw ourselves from a station of usefulness and suffering. And at some times we are ready to doubt, whether the goodness to which divine providence seems to manifest so little regard in this life, will be owned and fully rewarded in another. But all these objections are silenced by the life, the death, and resurrection of the Son of God. And the nearest resemblance to him in goodness, integrity, and devotion; though joined with a resemblance to him in sufferings, appears to be as much our wisdom

wisdom as it is our excellence. We can-
not certainly think ourselves too good, to
be subjected to afflictions, reproaches, and
persecutions, when the Son of God sub-
mitted to these, for perfecting his charac-
ter, and for advancing his Father's honour,
and the credit and practice of virtue and
piety. *It must be enough for the servants,
if they be as their Lord.* Nor can we doubt
the wisdom of conforming as exactly as
possible to the pattern of our great Master,
when we see the same person an example
of the most consummate goodness, and ex-
alted felicity.

Jesus Christ, who came from heaven to
do the will of his Father; and whose
whole life was devoted to the honour of
God, and the good of mankind; *who went
about doing good*, publishing the most im-
portant truths, and conferring the most va-
luable benefits, though he was reviled and
persecuted wherever he went; and who
at last died a voluntary martyr for the truth
of God, and a victim to the rage of the
most unreasonable and wicked persecutors,
is yet worthy of our chearful and zealous
imitation. For the God who permitted
him to be murdered, did not forsake him
in death, but made death to him an en-
trance upon immortal glory and blessed-
ness; raising him on the third day from
the dead, and receiving him publicly,

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Acts ix.

Rev. iii.
21.

attended by angels into heaven ; from whence descending, he appeared to two of his apostles, with a radiance above the light of the sun. And from his heavenly glory he calls to every one, saying, *Unto him who overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne, as I overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.* Thus he assures us, that the reward, though deferred is not lost ; but reserved, that it may be infinitely increased ; and that *light afflictions*, and those comparatively *but for a moment*, may work out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal glory.

Thus deserving are the holy Scriptures of our daily serious reading and meditation, on account of those histories and examples of virtue and piety which they contain. The histories and examples of a contrary kind, recorded in them, may prove also exceeding useful ; as cautions or deterrents from indulging to the same sins. How dearly did *Jacob* pay for the cheat, which he put upon *Isaac*, his father, in twenty years banishment and servitude in a foreign country ; and in his frequent apprehensions from the resentment of *Esau* ? When, had he waited to receive the promised blessing from God in the way of truth and integrity, he might have enjoyed it clear of all these evils. How severely also was the guilt of *David*, in the affair

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of *Uriah*, punished by the rebellion and death of *Absalom*, the violation of his daughter, the murder of his son, by his own banishment from his capital, by the dishonour done his wives; and by those agonies of conscience, which those calamities must excite as effects of the divine displeasure against him? And who in his senses, allured by sinful pleasure, and presuming on the favour and mercy of God, would venture in like manner to transgress; when in this instance he hath seen how awfully a righteous God hath punished such sins, in one of his most favoured servants?

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The histories of the unnatural lusts, and the miraculous destruction of the sinners inhabiting *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*; of the frequent murmurings and rebellions, and frequent punishments of the *Israelites*, in the wilderness, and afterwards in *Canaan*; of the disobedience and rejection of *Saul*, the fall and punishment of *Solomon*, omitting other instances, are striking proofs, how usefully the sacred writers have recorded these facts for our instruction and warning; and what advantage every honest mind may draw from the serious perusal of the sacred writings: especially when it is added, that we are not left to uncertain reasonings and conjectures, as to the real causes of the good or evil which beset them; but are

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taught clearly and expressly, that the one was the reward dispensed by divine providence to such particular virtues, and the other the punishment allotted to such instances of disobedience and wickedness.

May this be sufficient to determine your cheerful obedience to the command of our Lord, to *search the Scriptures*; and let me close the subject with a few proper reflections.

1. Do the holy Scriptures furnish us with such excellent instructions and assistances, for raising all to virtue, piety, and everlasting blessedness? We may hence infer their truth and divine original. This is a proof which offers itself to the understanding and experience of the unlearned, who can read them with judgment; and who though unable to examine nicely, and determine judiciously, as to antient records, and their authority, may, from the divine excellence they perceive in the Scriptures, with reason conclude their divine original. For unless Jesus had really been what he claimed to be, the Son of God, and guided by his spirit; and unless his apostles had been partakers of the same heavenly gift; how can it be accounted for, that the reputed son of a carpenter and a few unlearned fishermen should offer to the world, with clearness and simplicity, what all the philosophers of past ages, by their successive

five studies and improvements, could not form and have not left us, a compleat and consistent scheme of religion and morals? That they should have given the most grand and amiable representations of the perfections and providence of the one true God, unclouded by error and superstition, plain and comprehensive precepts of piety and virtue, and the most animating motives to frail offending creatures; and in their own lives amiable and attractive examples of the exalted goodness they recommended? Some of the Jews, who knew the mean education of Jesus, and who were witnesses to his mighty works, and heard his divine discourses, asked with astonishment, *whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works; is not this the carpenter's son?* Nor can the questions be answered to the satisfaction of the considerate and impartial, but by saying, that the reputed son of a carpenter was really the Son of God, and commissioned by him to instruct, reform, and save mankind.

We can farther observe, that the sincere Christian, who discerns and experiences the admirable fitness of the Scriptures for forming him to a divine temper, and preparing him for a divine happiness, in the perfection of knowledge, goodness, friendship, and devotion, may with reason be

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satisfied, notwithstanding all the clamours of unbelievers, about enthusiasm, priestcraft, and implicit faith. For granting the infidel all he would have, that the Christian may be deceived in believing the divine original of the Scriptures; yet as to their good influence in forming him to the love of God, and the practice of righteousness, which is a matter of his own experience, he cannot be deceived; and he is then certain that his mistake, as to the other article, should it prove a mistake, cannot hurt him. Nay more, as it is certain from facts and manifold experience, that the Scriptures, whether divinely inspired or not, yet supply to the bulk of mankind aids for becoming pious and virtuous, greatly superior to those which the Deist derives from unassisted reason; and as a natural consequence of this, the sincere Christian will enter the next state with more improved habits of virtue and piety, and in a better preparation for enjoying a rational and divine felicity; he must in the next state have greatly the advantage above him, who rejected the authority and assistance of the Scriptures. But the internal excellence and divine efficacy of the Scriptures prove it an unreasonable and wicked supposition, that they were the productions of artful and wicked men. And the external evidence from history
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and facts concur in proving them, what they claim to be, *given by inspiration of God*, and his kind directions to frail and erring mortals in the way to genuine piety and virtue, and to solid satisfaction in this life, and everlasting blessedness in another state. The thoughtful, pious, and good, have therefore the best reasons for continuing in the belief and practice of the Christian religion.

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2. Hence we may learn what reason we have to thank God for favouring us with his word; and appointing our birth and education, where we might in the best manner enjoy its powerful assistances for becoming pious, good, and happy. The blessedness for which the Scriptures are so well adapted to form us, is of infinite value, being compleat and everlasting. How unspeakably great then our obligations to the free grace of God, who not only sent his Son by his gospel to enlighten the world, but appointed us to be born, where throughout our lives we might injoy the brightest beams of this Sun of righteousness. Compare, my friends, your situation with the state of the heathen world, who instead of knowing and worshipping the true God, a Being of infinite perfection, worship false deities of whimsical or immoral characters, and endeavour to please them, by absurd or immoral superstitions.

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Their religion therefore, instead of improving their dispositions, and preparing them for happiness, disqualifies them for the rational and pure felicity of the heavenly state. And their representations of a future state also are childish and irrational, and their assertions of it without any good proof. Instead of being taught to *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in hope of eternal life*, they are directed to *wash often* in the river *Ganges*, to build hospitals for maintaining mice, or other animals; to drag about heavy chains of iron; and even to lie down, that the waggons which carry their idols may crush them; or to take every precaution, that they may expire holding the tail of a sacred cow in their hand, and the like. This, Sirs, is the religion of nations, whose natural sense is not inferior to ours, and something like this might have been our religion, laborious and tormenting through life, and fruitless after death; had not God, of his mere goodness, appointed our birth, where we might enjoy the light of his revelation. “*Even so, O Father, for so it pleased Thee!*” And to Thee we give the praise, that we are so favourably situated, for enjoying the satisfactions of rational piety and genuine goodness in this life; and for rising to those exalted degrees of blessedness, for which

which they prepare the soul in the life to come !

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Consider also the state of the popish world, wherein though the Scriptures are received and acknowledged as of divine authority, yet so cruel and unjust are their spiritual governors, as to seclude them from general use in a language not commonly understood ; while they give the people in their room lying legends, absurd articles of faith, useless rites of worship, and senseless superstitions : and where, instead of worshipping in *spirit and in truth*, the one God, through the *one Mediator Jesus Christ*, they are taught to pray to God without understanding, in an unknown language, to trust in the mediation of the Virgin *Mary*, of angels and departed saints and dead sinners. These they hope to engage in their favour, even though they should continue destitute of real virtue and piety, by pompous processions, large donations to their images and priests. And by the help of their superabundant merits, they hope, after they have confessed to the priest, and been absolved, to be admitted into heaven ; even after their lives have been led in direct opposition to the great and plain precepts of the gospel, and their tempers are averse to the pure and divine employments and pleasures of heaven. Our country, till about two hundred years ago, was over-
spread

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spread with popish darkness, superstitions, and idolatries, and deprived of the light of the Scriptures, like other nations of *Europe*; when it pleased God to succeed the struggles of our ancestors for religious truth and liberty. And though the partizans of *Rome* have frequently renewed their attempts to enslave us, and with great appearance of success, a merciful God seasonably interposing hath as often frustrated them. We have still the free use of the sacred Scriptures, can study them constantly and impartially, and form our religious sentiments, profession, and conduct, according to what we think God hath taught us in them.

These are invaluable privileges, that we can *worship in spirit and in truth the one only living and true God*, through the *one mediator Jesus Christ*; can regard and cultivate the love of God, and of our neighbour, and a preference of immortality, as the main of religion—can look forward to an eternity of moral perfection, and improving felicity, unterrified by a dismal purgatory. And instead of being encouraged to indulge to vicious passions, trusting in priestly absolution, a death-bed attrition and confession, and thus perishing for ever; we are continually excited to *live soberly, righteously, and godly*; and to expect *glory, honour, and immortality*, only
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in consequence of a *patient continuance in well-doing*. Let us bless God who hath granted, and who continues to us these advantages; let us highly value and faithfully improve them; that they may never be taken from us. This minds me of a

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3d Reflection, how important it is that we form our temper and conduct on the instructions of those holy writings, which we believe to have been given by divine inspiration; as we would attain the never ending blessedness which they promise. Heavy will be their condemnation, who when this divine light is come into the world, and shines round about them, *love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*. It would have been better for us, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to turn from the holy commandment; living in disobedience to precepts which we acknowledge to be divine, neglecting instructions we profess to have received from heaven; and despising the immortality brought to light by the Son of God, to pursue sinful pleasures even to the brink of that eternal destruction, of which he hath so expressly and often warned us. *The word which I have spoken, said our Lord, shall judge you, at the last day*. Let us live according to its

John iii:
19.

2 Pet.
ii. 21.

John
xii. 48.

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its directions now, that it may not then condemn us.

While others therefore form their temper and practice in agreement to the maxims and customs of a wicked world, let us, my friends, as persons *taught by God* in the holy Scriptures, *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts*, mortify all these works of the flesh, *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings*, and all such practices; *knowing that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Let us enter our closets, and by daily secret devotion, earnest prayer, and affectionate praises, cultivate grateful love, trust, and subjection to God, and thus form ourselvss to live under an habitual conviction of his presence, and animated by the noble hope of his approbation. Let us every day meditate on the life and love of the Saviour, and thus learn to live like him, fervently pious, actively beneficent and compassionate, steddily meek and patient, persevering in doing good, indifferent to the interests and pleasures of a world, which is passing away, and intent on the blessedness promised in the Scriptures, and which is consummate, divine, and everlasting.

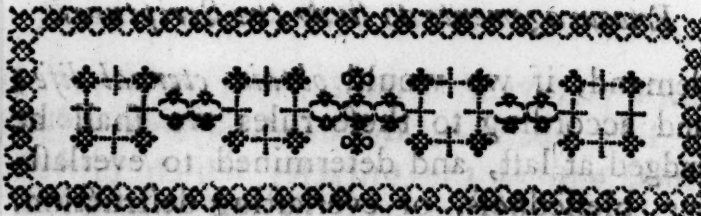
This, Christians, is the temper, and this the conduct which the sacred Scriptures demand,

demand, if we would *obtain eternal life*; and according to these rules we shall be judged at last, and determined to everlasting blessedness, or everlasting destruction. How dreadful will it be to have those Scriptures, which were given to guide us to heaven, produced against us in judgment, and condemning us to hell! May we all prevent this, by being *not forgetful hearers, but doers of the word*; that we may be blessed, for ever blessed, in our deed!

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2 Thes.
i. 8.

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S E R M O N XII.

The Objections against the Excellence and Usefulness of the Holy Scriptures, considered and answered.



I CORINTHIANS i. 25.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men.

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HEN Saint Paul preached the gospel to the people of *Corinth*, a rich and learned city of *Greece*, it was treated with contempt by many there, both *Jews* and *Greeks*, on account of the unadorned simplicity with which it was propounded to their faith, by preachers unsupported by wealth, power, or eloquence. In opposition to this prejudice the apostle declared, that

that a plain and well attested relation of SERMON
XII. the life, doctrine, and death of a crucified Jesus, and of the miracles which proved his divine mission, and of the prophecies accomplished in him; given by men who were enabled to prove the authenticity of their relation, by numerous miracles and gifts of the divine Spirit, was to persons who fairly considered things, a more solid foundation for a religious faith, than artful deductions from controverted principles of philosophy, so much admired by the *Greeks*; though adorned with all the charms of eloquence of which they were fond, and published by men of riches, power, and rank; such as the *Jews* thought alone qualified to proclaim and extend the kingdom of the Messiah.

In the Apostle's method of spreading the Christian religion, there was no room for suspecting deception by human art and policy; but their faith was built upon the only solid foundation, *the wisdom and power of God*. And the success of this method proved it to be well chosen; for the plain and despised preachers of Christ crucified, did more in a few years to form mankind to rational piety, genuine virtue, and a divine temper, and thus to prepare them for a divine felicity; than their philosophers, or learned rabbies, had been able to effect in many ages. And thus the method appointed

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pointed by God, which on account of the artless simplicity of it was despised as *foolishness*, was shown to be *wiser than men*; and what they called *weakness*, with regard to the *immediate instruments*, being supported by God, proved *stronger than men*.

Having in several preceding discourses recommended to you the study of the Scriptures, by representing the various noble and important truths which they teach us, and their advantageous manner of conveying instruction to all; I have chosen the words of the Apostle, as a proper introduction to a vindication of the sacred writings against some objections made to their supposed excellence and usefulness: that no prejudice might be left in the minds of any to prevent their studying the holy Scriptures with that faith, esteem, and those large expectations of advantage, which are necessary to persons studying them with continued diligence and great improvement. And I hope that the answers given to these objections may serve farther to evince, that what some vain men have accounted and called *foolishness*, is really from God, and *wiser than men*; and what they have despised as *weakness*, *stronger than men*.

The *objections* against the supposed excellence and usefulness of the *Scriptures*, which I shall distinctly *examine* and *answer*, are the following.

I. It

I. It has been objected, “ that the
“ Scriptures are obscure. Witness the
“ variety of commentaries written to ex-
“ plain them; and the *numerous controver-*
“ *sies* about their meaning, which have per-
“ plexed all ages of the church.” To this
we answer in general, that the greater part
of the obscurity of which persons complain
might have been cleared, and most of the
disputes prevented or ended, if men had
attended to the plain and reasonable rules
of interpretation, given in the begining of
these discourses on the study of the Scrip-
tures. Rules, the justness of which they
readily admit, and honestly enough observe,
in their interpretation of other antient wri-
ters, where they have no interest, passion, or
prejudice to be served by mistaking or mis-
representing the meaning. If therefore
through want of due attention, impartial-
ity, and diligence, persons confound them-
selves and perplex others, in their searches
after the sense of Scripture, the blame can-
not with justice be thrown on the sacred
writings, as if these were faultily obscure;
but belongs to the persons, who refuse an
honest care and diligence to this important
study.

Is it not evident enough to the common
sense and reason of mankind, that a *wafer*
cannot be a human body; and much more
that ten thousand distinct *wasers* cannot

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every one of these be the whole body of Christ, and yet the body of Christ be but one? And is it not, if possible, still more evident, that the *wafers* which ten thousand priests, in ten thousand different churches hold up between their fingers to be worshiped, with twenty thousand consecrated *wafers* more, which are in the mouths or stomachs of as many different communicants, cannot be each of these the whole body of Christ, which yet is but one; and this one body, at the same time, intirely in heaven at the right hand of God in glory? Is it not therefore most evident, that these words of Christ, *this is my body*, instead of being intended by him to declare this most absurd and contradictory notion, were designed to communicate, by an easy figure, this plain meaning—"This broken bread is a representation of my body, which is soon to be broken for you?" Yet what controversies have been raised about the meaning of these words; and how many thousand volumes written, to darken an evident proposition; and vindicate the grossest of all absurdities *Transubstantiation*? Disputes therefore raised about the sense of Scripture are not certain proofs that it is obscure; they only prove, that numbers are more influenced by education, prejudice, authority, interest, or passion, than

than by reason and honesty, in their interpretations of Scripture. If these writings therefore are, what notwithstanding this objection they may well be allowed to be, easy to be understood by every serious, honest, and attentive reader, in their accounts of whatever is necessary to be known by us, in order to our pleasing God, and attaining everlasting blessedness; this is a sufficient encouragement to read and study them with diligence, and a sufficient vindication of their clearness.

I would ask, is this obscurity, which some object to the Scriptures, to be found in the representation of doctrines and precepts necessary for all to know, believe, and obey; or is it to be found only in the relations of other matters, which are indeed when known great and important; but not absolutely necessary to our believing or practising the religion of Christ, so as to obtain the favour of God and solid satisfaction in this life, and to become meet for injoying compleat blessedness hereafter? That the Scriptures cannot be obscure when they deliver truths necessary for all to know, believe, and practise, may be strongly argued from the wisdom and goodness of God, who when he revealed himself to mankind, would make obvious to the knowledge and comprehension of every serious honest and diligent reader, whatever was

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Luke xii.
47, 48.

of the greatest importance to the unlearned, as well as the learned, the simple as well as the improved and judicious. For it is certain, that the capacity and advantages of each particular person, must be to him the measure of duty in regard to knowledge, faith, or practice; and that those truths, which he cannot discover by an honest and diligent improvement of these, cannot affect his interest in the divine favour and his eternal salvation.

And that the Scriptures are in fact as plain in all important articles, as from the divine perfections we conclude they would be, may be left to the fair determination of every man, who will read the *Gospels*, the *Acts* and the practical parts of the *Epistles* with attention and impartiality. The general agreement also of honest and considerate Christians, who are allowed freely to peruse the Scriptures, in the following most important truths—the existence, perfections, and providence of God, an eternal, infinite, and all-perfect Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world—that he is ready to forgive and accept the frail offending children of men, when they repent, believe in his Son, and become heartily subject to his authority—that we are obliged to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, if we would be found meet for the happiness of the
next

next—and that God is ready to assist our endeavours thus to live—that he will at the end of the world, raise all the dead, and judge all men, in righteousness by his Son; and *render glory, honour, and immortality, to a patient continuance in well doing; but punish the obstinately wicked, with everlasting destruction, in the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels*—The general agreement in the belief of these important truths is a valid proof, that the Scriptures are sufficiently clear in revealing all necessary articles of faith. For these mentioned are truths, which when heartily believed, and often considered, are sufficient to direct and animate all, to cultivate those dispositions and practise those duties, which will render men approved of God, and meet for a rational and divine felicity in heaven; and the clearer knowledge and juster apprehensions of these most important truths, attained by common christians conversant in the Scriptures; than the greatest philosophers of antiquity, unassisted by revelation, did or could attain—this evident fact sufficiently proves also, that superior advantages attend the instructing persons by the Scripture revelations with all their obscurities, to the leaving them destitute of these to the sole aids of the best improved reason.

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As to the Scriptures being obscure in some other articles, useful and important, but not necessary to be generally known, this may be admitted without any impeachment of the wisdom or goodness of God; or justly discouraging any from reading the Scriptures frequently and attentively. Since in the nature of things the Scriptures must in many articles, be obscure to us who live at such a distance of time from the first writing them; and yet even this obscurity may be in a great degree removed from those who continue to study them, and to improve faithfully the assistances offered them. This obscurity also, while it continues, may answer various important purposes; as for the trial and exercise of our love to religious truths, and of our candor, moderation, and charity towards persons who differ from us in their opinions as to these; and for keeping us in mind, that this world is not our home; and that a perfection of knowledge, goodness, and felicity, is not to be expected till after death; and that our great concern in the mean time is, to prepare ourselves for possessing it by acting suitably to the light and advantages which we enjoy.

The Scriptures of the Old Testament having been written so many ages since, in a language long disused, and there being
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no writings extant beside these but which are some hundred years later, as to many facts, customs, and opinions which are briefly referred to, and the wisdom of laws formed with regard to these facts and customs, the knowledge of which is lost to us, and the meaning of words and phrases but once or twice used in the Old Testament, and the like—it is manifest, that without any faults in the sacred writers, we must in such cases be ignorant or uncertain. For though these passages are obscure to us, yet the sacred writers were easily understood, by their cotemporaries to whom they wrote, and who had the knowledge which we want of the language, facts, and customs; and certainly they cannot with reason be blamed, if since their time other writings have been lost, which would have greatly assisted us in discovering their full meaning. And as to many of those obscurities, which are made a ground of complaint, they may be, in a good degree, cleared up by a careful reading and observation of the Scripture history; and by comparing one part with another, and one word or phrase employed by the sacred writers, with another; and by consulting commentators, who have collected and well applied the remains of ancient history.

Many of the prophecies which related to the state of *Israel* and *Judah*, and of

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the nations round them, are to us obscure, through the want of a distinct account from history of the persons, characters, and facts to which they had a regard, and which were well known to the persons of those times. The predictions therefore were sufficiently clear to them for answering their principal design, convincing the *Jews* of those ages of the providence and government of Jehovah, the only true God, of the odiousness of idolatry and wickedness to him, and of the certain vengeance which would overtake these crimes. And though we at this distance cannot discover the full meaning of every prediction, or demonstrate the accomplishment; yet from the few remains of history, we can determine the sense, and prove the accomplishment of the principal, those, for instance, which relate to * *Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, and Tyre*. And from the religious and moral instructions of the prophets, thus proved, to have been given by a divine authority, we may with certainty infer, that idolatry, profaneness, fraud, lying, injustice, oppression, cruelty, lewdness, adultery, intemperance, and the like vices, are odious to a governing God; and that if we would ingage his providence in our favour, and have our end peace, we must

* See Prideaux Connect. V. I. and Rollin's Antient History,

do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before him.

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Finally, as to the *Revelations of St. John*, which are confessed to be in many parts obscure, not to remark that the general doctrines, instructions, and encouragements of this book are clear; namely, that the faithful servants of Christ must long struggle with persecution and oppression; that they who held fast the truth and a good conscience would be gloriously rewarded; and that before the end of the world, the idolatrous, *corrupting*, and *persecuting party* would be destroyed, *mystical Babylon* be utterly ruined, and truth, piety, and righteousness reign gloriously every where, for a *long duration*—besides these truths, plainly taught, and which are of great and perpetual use, as to the predictions themselves it is observable, that the * accomplishment of many hath thrown such a light upon them, as hath served to make their meaning clear and determinate; and to put us also into the right method for clearing the sense of others; and hath assured us that these also will be in their season fulfilled. The serious, honest, and attentive may, by a diligent study, continually discover more and more of their meaning, and re-

* See *Lowman* on the *Revelations*—And *Bishop Newton* on *Prophecy*, V. III.

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ceive noble encouragement to persist in the profession and practice of the *truth*, as it is in *Jesus*, in opposition to the terrors and persecutions of antichrist.

This, I presume, may be admitted as a sufficient answer to the *first objection*, the obscurity of the holy Scriptures; that in matters of the greatest importance to all, they are plain enough to make the honest and attentive wise to salvation—and that as to other parts, which without any fault of the sacred writers, are become obscure to us, this obscurity may be in a great degree removed by continued diligence and impartiality in our studies of them; and while the discovery of new truths, or the presenting in a brighter light those before known, reward our pious diligence; the remaining difficulties and disagreements serve to exercise our mutual candor, modesty, and charity, and to improve us in these good qualities; while we learn to love all who love God, the Lord Jesus, truth, and goodness in sincerity, though they differ from us in their apprehensions of the truth, or as to the obligation of many things which have a relation to religion.

II. The artless and unadorned simplicity of the style employed by the writers of the holy books is made an objection against reading them, by some persons of more

more delicacy than judgment. This objection can affect only the historical and preceptive parts of Scripture. For the poetical, in grand and affecting descriptions of the divine perfections and works, in dignity of sentiment, and strong and beautiful colouring, far exceed *Homer*, *Virgil*, and the most admired writers of paganism. And for true eloquence, whether of the awful and commanding, the clear and convincing, the tender or persuasive kinds; the exhortations of *Moses*, *Isaiah*, or *Jeremiah*, several of *St. Paul's* speeches, and his xvth chapter of the 1st epistle to the *Corinthians*, will stand a comparison with the most celebrated orations of *Demosthenes*, or *Cicero*. Not so much because these holy men made the beauty and strength of composition and language, their principal study and labour, but because the grand and affecting truths which revelation communicated to them, so raised and warmed their imaginations, and engaged their passions; that without art and study they express themselves in a manner superior to all art, and excited in others the passions which they so strongly felt themselves. And least any should imagine that religious prejudice, and not the evidence of truth determines us to give this preference to many parts of Scripture, for the true sublime and persuasive, above the compositions of the

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the most admired heathen writers, this easy method of proving it hath been often proposed. Translate passages *literally*, as the Scriptures are translated, out of *Homer*, *Virgil*, *Pindar*, or other celebrated antients, and then compare these with parallel passages of the *Psalms*, or *Job*, or the Prophets; and the superiority of the sacred writers will appear beyond dispute.

And how could it be otherwise? The great, the beautiful, and persuasive in *language* must be derived from the grandeur, beauty, or importance of the thoughts and sentiments. And since in these the *heathen* writers cannot stand a comparison with the *inspired*; neither can they when their thoughts and sentiments are cloathed in language. The appearance, the works, and sentiments of *Homer's Gods*, described in the best manner in which he could represent them, must after all sink as much below the descriptions given by *Moses*, *Job*, *David*, or *Isaiab*, of the majesty, works, and counsels of *Jehovah*, as *Homer's* conceptions of the deity, were below the religious sentiments which they derived from revelation. The sublimity of the first chapter of *Genesis*, in which the perfect ease, with which *Jehovah* made all things, is so affectingly represented in the ease and simplicity of the language—*God said, let there be light, and there was light*—hath been

been acknowledged and admired by a celebrated heathen Critic, *Longinus*. And whosoever will compare the concluding chapters of the book of *Job*, the VIIIth, XVIIth, XIXth, XXXIIIth, the CIIIth, and CIVth, the CXXXIXth, the CXLVth, and CXLVIIth Psalms, not to mention others; or the XLth chapter of *Isaiah*, the description of the angel, *Revelation* x. and of the last judgment, xx. 11. and others of a like kind, with the most celebrated passages of *Homer*, or *Virgil*, will see, that the sacred writers knew, on proper occasions, to express themselves in a manner superior for grandeur and beauty, to the most animated and laboured compositions of mere human genius. I say on proper occasions, for there are occasions wherein *simplicity* and *plainness*, though made objections against the sacred writings, are a real excellence and beauty; for instance, when *precepts*, *doctrines*, or *histories* are delivered.

Laws and precepts which are to be obeyed, and doctrines which are to be received by all, as in order to this they must be intelligible by all, cannot be expressed with too much plainness. When the almighty Creator speaks and gives laws, his authority, not eloquence, is to determine our obedience. Equals or inferiors study and employ art and eloquence, that they may persuade

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John v.
28.

persuade and prevail; but when the supreme lawgiver, and Lord of the universe, speaks—*Thus saith Jehovah, thou shalt have no other Gods but me—Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy—Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee*—the clearness and decisive authority constitute the true sublime. *And verily I say unto you, the hour is coming, in which all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they who have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation—*spoken by one, who proved the doctrine of a general resurrection and final judgment to be truths, as certain, as important, by actually restoring the dead to life—this plain and solemn assertion of these great events hath in it more real majesty and sublimity, than the laboured and eloquent proofs given by persons destitute of this authority.

As for the *historical* books of Scripture, in these also the unadorned simplicity and clearness are real excellences. The histories were intended to be useful to all, the plainer therefore the narration, the better was it suited to the apprehensions of all. And the less there appears of art, and the more simplicity and sincerity in the relations, the more readily and reasonably are they

they credited. And the firmest faith in the sacred histories is necessary, that we may be determined to act in constant conformity to their design. Besides, in regard to the *gospel history*, against which this objection is chiefly levelled, let it be considered—that as God intended to give men, by Jesus Christ a compleat draught of religion and morality, by which the minds of all might be formed to a meetness for his full favour, and the blessedness of an everlasting state; for giving to all ages a rational assurance, that it was a divine revelation, and justly claimed their intire belief and obedience; he not only confirmed it by numerous miracles, but to prevent all suspicion, that it was the production of human policy and learning, appointed, that the *Revealer*, and *first Preachers* of it should be persons destitute of the aids of human literature. The reputed Son of a carpenter, bred in his family, and a company of fishermen, or persons of like unlearned education, were to propose to the world, what human learning and philosophy had not been able to produce; a just and compleat description of true religion and morality, enforced by the strongest motives, and without any mixtures of error; that *our faith might not rest on the wisdom of man, but on the power of God.*

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1 Cor.
ii. 5.

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The sermons of Jesus Christ contain the most important instructions, delivered with the majesty and simplicity of a divine law-giver, and obedience to them is enforced by motives, which need not human eloquence to give them weight. The favour of almighty God, the full remission of sins, acceptance with God, and a peculiar conduct of his providence, assured to the penitent, the sincere, and obedient; a future glorious resurrection unto eternal life and blessedness. Or the displeasure of God, the tortures of a guilty mind, the dread of death, the terrors of deserved condemnation, by the Son of God, before angels and men, and of eternal destruction, are denounced to the obstinately wicked and impenitent, that they may be roused to consideration, and determined to repent. And the authority of this divine instructor was established by his giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleanness to the leprous, soundness to the maimed, and diseased, and life to the dead with a word. He exemplified also in his own life the exalted piety, generous kindness, firm integrity, and noble indifference to the world, which he demanded from his disciples; and having sealed the truth of his divine mission with his testimony in death, he was declared the Son of God, with power, by his resurrection from the dead. The relation

lation of these transactions is given us by SERMON
XII. his disciples, who were his constant companions, eye and ear-witnesses of what they related, and men simple and unlearned.

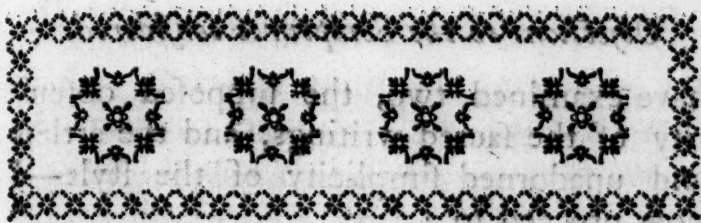
Had these disciples been enabled by divine *inspiration* to write with the art and eloquence of *Cicero*, would not this have shaken the credit of their testimony? Who then would have believed, that illiterate fishermen, or tax-gatherers, wrote a relation, which attentive readers would say, had in it all the appearances of study, learning, labour, and improvement? That the evangelists therefore wrote like the persons they really were, honest, but unlearned, capable of knowing the certainty of the facts which they related and of relating them fairly, but incapable of forging such an account—that they simply represent, without intermixing any reflections in favour of their master, virtues great, actions, and excellent discourses, which they saw and heard, but could not have invented—that they relate as fairly and simply their own prejudices, mistakes, ambitious contests, and the like; and write as men, who, being fully persuaded of the truths they related, concluded they should command the belief of all the honest and considerate—that they wrote in this manner is a much more rational assurance to us of

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the important doctrines and facts which they recorded, and a stronger confirmation of the religion which they taught; than if they had written with the art of *Sallust*, and the eloquence of *Cicero*, and placed every great action and sentiment in the most striking light; and made every reflection, for which the subject gave occasion, to the honour of their master, and of his religion. Such art and eloquence might have raised suspicions of their strict veracity in the wise and considerate; whereas their manifest artlessness and sincerity powerfully commend them to the belief of the judicious and unprejudiced. That therefore which has been objected, as a defect, turns out to be a real excellence; and this, which has been called the *foolishness of God*, proves to be *wiser than men*.

III. The many bad actions of persons, in appearance good, which are recorded in the Scriptures, without a particular condemnation of them, have been objected against the usefulness of reading the Scriptures. The examination of this, and another specious objection, will be reserved for the next discourse.



S E R M O N XIII.

The Objections against the Excellence and Usefulness of the Holy Scriptures, considered and answered.



I CORINTHIANS i. 25.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men.

 N a preceding discourse on these words, I proposed to consider and answer the principal objections, which have been urged against the excellence of the holy Scriptures, and the advantage to be derived from a diligent and impartial study of them. I

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have examined two, the supposed obscurity of the sacred writings, and the artless and unadorned simplicity of the style—I now proceed to a

III^d Objection, “ That many bad actions of persons, in appearance good, are recorded, without a particular condemnation of them.”

To this we answer, that the objection itself is a proof of the honesty and sincerity of the sacred writers, who have not concealed the faults of the persons whom they most loved and admired. And as to the danger that the simple and honest reader may be thus led into vice, it is objected without good reason to support it; since the divine precepts are in the Bible given us as our rule; and the examples to be no further regarded, than as they are conformable to the precepts. The errors and transgressions of many good men, whose virtues are recorded with honour by the sacred historians, are often expressly censured, and the punishments which followed them specified; and we are thus clearly taught, that a crime, committed by a person, in the main pious and good, instead of being overlooked by a holy God, is treated with more signal marks of his displeasure. This appears from the accounts of the unwarrantable anger of *Moses*, and the adultery and murder committed by

Isaiah
viii. 20.
1 Cor.
xi. 1.
Gal. ii.
11.

by *David*. The vices of good men therefore, thus represented, are most useful lessons, being awful admonitions of the danger arising from indulgence to such passions; and solemn warnings to avoid those rocks, on which such great and good men were in danger of perishing.

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As to those cases, wherein the follies and sins of great and good men are barely related, without a particular and express condemnation; yet by the general and repeated censures, past on actions of this kind, in the Scriptures, we are sufficiently cautioned against an imitation. And even by the effects and consequences of these faults, related by the same writers, we are instructed in their evil nature. The dissimulation of *Abraham*, with regard to *Sarah's* being his wife, and representing her as his sister, was evidently and severely punished, by the anxious apprehensions he must be under for her honour, while she was in the power of *Abimilech*; although God was pleased, in an extraordinary manner, to protect her. Both *Abraham* and *Jacob* appeared to have paid dear for having more wives than one at a time; in the uneasinesses, jealousies, and contentions excited at home; where every wise man would most desire to find peace, harmony, and constant love and union. Although *Moses* does not particularly condemn the

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fraud practised by *Jacob* to gain the blessing of the first born; yet the ill consequences in which he represents *Jacob* to have been involved by it, his flight from his father's house, *twenty years servitude* with *Laban*, and the frauds *Laban* practised upon him, and his frequent apprehensions of death from the revenge of *Esau*—all these fully declare the evil of fraud, and lying, and the wisdom of adhering to truth, simplicity, and integrity. The like may be applied to other instances. We may therefore with great advantage read the holy Scriptures, even where the vices of good men are related; since these relations are given us in a manner proper to make us humble and fearful of offending, and by no means presumptuous in transgressing. And they who make so perverse an use of them, as to encourage themselves in like transgressions, take offence where none was given, and harden themselves in wickedness, and are not countenanced in it by the Scripture-examples.

IV. Another, and the last * objection I shall now take notice of, which hath been urged against our improvement by the study of the Scriptures, is this—" that

* See *Leland's Answer to Tindal*, V. II. p. 166 and 245, — *Crellii. Respons. ad Quæst.* Tom. II. p. 322 — and *Dr. Jeffery's Sermon* on Heb. i. 1.

“ they

“ they have not delivered the doctrines and
“ duties of religion in a regular and syste-
“ matic method ; first laying down the
“ principles and doctrines of religion, and
“ thence deducing these several duties ;
“ but have intermixed doctrines with his-
“ tories, and precepts with both.” This
objection is partly founded in fact, and
partly not. For the Scriptures in many
parts have given us the doctrines and du-
ties of religion in what is called a regular
method ; witness, the transactions at mount
Sinai, and the laws there given to *Israel*,
and the *Sermon* which our divine master
delivered from the mount ; not to mention
other instances. And where the sacred
writers have followed another method, the
following observations will, I hope, set
aside the force of this objection.

Moses begins with laying this solid founda-
tion of religion in the 1st and 2d chap-
ters of *Genesis*, that there is a God,
almighty, most wise, and good, the Crea-
tor of the world and of mankind ; and
therefore the rightful governor and dis-
poser of all, and the supreme judge. He
then relates various instances of *duties* en-
joined by God, and gives examples of his
approving, accepting, favouring and re-
warding the sincerely pious and righteous ;
and of his displeasure against the profane
and wicked, his cursing and punishing them.

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This is evidently a shorter and easier, and therefore better way of teaching the generality, religion and virtue, than by close and long connected reasonings on the nature of God, and the nature of man, and the relations wherein men stand to God, to one another, and to the present and a future life. And accordingly in fact, for one person who hath attained to the knowledge and practice of true religion and morality, under the instruction of the philosophers in the systematic way, *thousands* have been formed to high degrees of both by the holy Scriptures in this plain and easy method.

Let it be remembered, that it was not the design of God, by his revelations, to excuse men from diligent endeavours to improve their reason in religious matters, or from assisting and instructing one another, but to give them such instructions and aids, as, if they did their duty to themselves and to one another, should put them into possession of all the religious knowledge necessary and convenient to their state of trial. The first parents of mankind as they absolutely needed it, were immediately instructed by God, in the principles and duties of religion and morality, so far as to qualify them for a state of trial. And they were then left, by a proper improvement of the *Sabbath* particularly, in studying

Gen. ii.
3.

ing the works of God, celebrating his perfections, conversing with him, and reflecting on themselves, and by mutual communications, to improve themselves and one another in religion and morals. And they were afterward by proper education and instructions to convey this important knowledge to their children. In this method God deals with men agreeably to their nature; and gives them room to acquire the satisfaction, merit, and rewards of improving themselves, and edifying others. As new circumstances rendered new revelations necessary, they were granted.

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The principles and truths which the several generations of men wanted, for the continuance and advance of religious knowledge and practice, were communicated to them by God; and they were then left by an honest and careful exercise of their rational powers thus assisted, to deduce particular truths from general principles, and from general precepts particular rules of duty, suitable to their varying circumstances; and by instruction to communicate these to their children and dependents. As therefore the common Father of all, with great wisdom and goodness, designed to assist and encourage, by his revelations, not to preclude the diligent and faithful exertion
of

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of mens rational powers in religious subjects. And the Scriptures are so far from prohibiting human instruction and the use of human writings, that they direct us in it, and qualify us to judge of their truth and importance. With considerate persons then it can be no valid objection against the holy Scriptures, that they are not written in a manner, which might render unnecessary human instruction and improvement,

As the circumstances and relations of mankind are continually changing, and as these change, it becomes their duty to act in a different manner, in these numerous differing cases; had God in his revelations deduced, in a regular order, all the principles and duties of religion, and applied them to the solution of all possible difficulties, and to our full direction in all cases that could arise; *twenty large folios* would not have contained this revelation. And the largeness of the revelation, and the infinite number of particulars, would have confounded the religious inquirer, rather than instructed and guided him. The wisdom of God is therefore to be acknowledged, who hath given us, in the Scriptures, such principles and general rules, as honest and attentive minds may apply to the various speculations and difficulties which may be raised, and to the perpetually

Mat. v.
vi. and
vii.

ally varying cases which occur in the conduct of life. Who hath also, in some instances, applied these to particular cases for our direction in doing the like; and illustrated the general rules by examples. This is sufficient for giving to the diligent and sincere, the knowledge necessary for conducting themselves aright, for pleasing their Maker, and preparing themselves for future blessedness. And if persons will not be thankful for what is sufficient, and contented with it, a wise God will not indulge their extravagant demands; and especially when this indulgence would not prove, upon the whole, advantageous to them.

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The method in which religious instructions are delivered, particularly in the *Gospels*, against which this objection is directly levelled; wherein you have intermixed the conversations, miracles, and actions of *Jesus Christ*; predictions delivered, precepts occasionally given, and the like; hath on many accounts the advantage above the systematical method proposed. For the facts historically recorded prove the truth of the doctrines, and enforce the obligation of the precepts. The instances of exalted piety and goodness in the life of *Jesus*, which are there recorded, explain his precepts, engage our obedience, and solidly prove the divine mission of a person, who

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who so nearly resembled the divine purity and goodness. The occasions on which the precepts were given illustrate their meaning, and direct us in applying them to parallel circumstances. The good fruits arising out of pious and virtuous dispositions, and the bad consequences we see attending the contrary, recommend and enforce obedience to the precepts. The predictions, by their accomplishment, establish the authority of the lawgiver; while the variety, in this method, attracts the attention; and by the different ways of communicating religious knowledge, every different capacity is supplied with instruction, and every honest mind becomes *thoroughly furnished unto every good work.*

Luke x.
25.

Tit. ii.
11.

From the Sermon on the Mount, or from Jesus' discourse with the Lawyer, wherein he reduces the sum of religion to the *love of God*, and the *love of our neighbour*; or from St. Paul's Summary of Sobriety, Righteousness, and Godliness, or from the concluding chapters of his epistles, they who are willing to form for themselves a regular system of precepts, may receive the necessary assistance for effecting it. And all are strongly excited and encouraged to conform their tempers and lives to the precepts of our divine master, by his example, his voluntary death, and glorious resurrection; by his full assurances of assistance

sistance and acceptance with God, of his SERMON
XIII. peculiar providence over the good, during their state of trial, and of his graciously receiving them after death to *Paradise*, to the society of angels, and spirits made perfect, and to the presence of the Redeemer; and by ascertaining to them a general judgment, when all shall receive according to their works; when everlasting life, glory, honour, and immortality will be rendered unto a patient continuance in well doing; but indignation, and wrath, tribulation, and anguish, to every soul of man who hath done evil, hath through life disobeyed the truth, and obeyed unrighteousness; in exact proportion to their several demerits, and when all the obstinately wicked shall be punished, with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Thus it appears, that though religious truths are not delivered, in the Scriptures, according to the order, which human art hath prescribed, yet there is abundant encouragement to study them, in preference to every other book; since they are able to make us wise unto everlasting salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let me now conclude, with exhorting you earnestly and successfully, to make the sacred Scriptures the subjects of your daily, serious study and meditation. Consider

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sider them, Christians, as the kind counsels of a God, infinitely wise and benevolent, given that you may pass with safety and satisfaction through the present life, may most improve your rational part, and prepare yourselves for the highest degrees of happiness in eternity. Read them therefore not carelessly, nor under the influence of prejudices; but with a strong concern to discover their real meaning; and with hearty resolutions of forming by them your temper and conduct, as you hope to possess the blessedness, which they promise to the obedient. Pray also with earnestness unto God, that he would lead you by them unto all useful truth, convince you wherein you have transgressed, reclaim you to the path of life, and guide you to everlasting salvation.

All other knowledge, excepting that of the religious and moral kind, which you can with certainty derive from the Scriptures alone, is rather matter of curious amusement; or in its beneficial effects terminates within the narrow limits of the present life. Whereas, in the Scriptures are contained the grandest and most important truths; and you may be certainly taught by them, to please that infinitely perfect and eternal Being, whose favour includes all happiness for time and for eternity. And under their influence you may
be

be formed to the perfection of your nature, a resemblance to the Deity, in rectitude and goodness; and thus become qualified to enjoy, not a shadow of pleasure, honour, and happiness, for a few days, but solid good, immortal glory, compleat and undecaying felicity, compared to the value of this the world is nothing; and compared with the duration of it, a thousand ages are but as a day. *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.—But the word of the Lord endureth for ever; and this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you.*

1 Pet. i.
24.

While others therefore study and follow the rules and maxims of worldly wisdom, and the examples of the polite and prosperous; and pursue, as their happiness, the pleasures, interests, or distinctions of this transitory life, let the sacred oracles, the directions of God, supremely wise and kind, be studied and regarded by you, as the rules of your conduct, and your guide to happiness. Let your views terminate on nothing below the favour of the great Sovereign of heaven and earth. Let it be your ambition to imitate the virtues and divine qualities of the Son of God, and to obtain that divine and everlasting felicity, to which he is gone before you, and of which,

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which, if you persevere in this course, he assures you. Then at the concluding day of our world, when all mankind shall be summoned before his tribunal, to have their condition determined for eternity, that Gospel, which you have made your study, and the *rule* of your *life*, shall be made the rule by which you are judged; and shall determine you to an abode in the glorious presence of God, and of the Redeemer, and in the society of angels, and of all wise and good men made perfect; where the perfection of blessedness will be enjoyed to eternity. And when the neglecters of the divine word, and the disobedient to it, shall be doomed to everlasting destruction, you having been honoured with the publick approbation of the Son of God shall be introduced by him, into the eternal life his Gospel promises; and to a meetness for which your spirits have been formed, by the doctrines, precepts, and promises which it contains.

God grant we may all thus become wise and happy.

S E R -

S E R M O N XIV.

The Character and Blessedness of
those to whom to live is CHRIST,
and to die is GAIN.

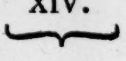


PHILIPPIANS, i. 21.

For me to live is Christ, and to die is Gain.

 HIS character St. Paul gives
of himself, belongs in a lower
sense, to every sincere christian,
and was in a good degree the
character of that able and faithful Servant
of *Christ*, whose death we now lament,
and who so often from this place hath en-
deavoured to form Christ in you *—I have
therefore chosen these words for the sub-
ject of our meditation on this awful occa-
sion.

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* Rev. Mr. JAMES STRONG, at ILMINSTER, 1738.

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Ver. 20.

tion. They are added by the apostle as the reason of his confidence, that *Christ would be magnified in his body, either by his life, or death*. If he lived, it would be for the advancement of the christian cause; and if he died a martyr, he should confirm, and do honour to it in death; because ever since his embracing the gospel, it had been the main concern and business of his life to spread the religion of *Jesus*; and because he was assured that if he died for it, death would be infinitely his gain, introducing him to the glorious presence of Christ, and a share in his happiness. Animated by such an hearty and approved zeal, and so divine an encouragement, he could not fail of honouring his Master, and promoting his cause, whether he lived, or died. To render our meditations on this text the more useful, I shall,

I. Distinctly represent their character who can say, *to me to live is Christ*.

II. What gain death is to persons of this character.

III. Show the connection there is between this course of life, and the happiness that follows it.

And then add a few reflections.

I. I am distinctly to represent their character, who can with truth say, each for himself, *to me to live is Christ*. The following particulars are included in it.

I

1. They

1. They have, after a thorough conviction of the truth and excellency of the christian religion, received it, as the foundation of their hopes; and the rule of their lives; and thus chosen Christ for their Lord and Saviour. St. Paul had the fullest conviction of our Lord's divine authority; by his glorious appearance to him, by the miraculous gifts he conferred upon him; and the wonders he enabled him to work in his name, throughout the Roman empire. He had also the highest value for that religion, by which *all who believed were justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses*; which supplied the weakness of the law by the aids of the divine Spirit, enabling us to mortify the deeds of the body, which *abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light*; at the same time directing us, in order to attain this immortality, not to the observance of carnal ordinances, but *to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*. He therefore accounted all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

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Acts
ix. 14.
1 Cor.
xiv. 18.
2 Cor.
xii. 11,
12.

Rom. xv.
18, 19.

Acts xiii.
39.

Rom.
vii. 25.
viii. 1.
2 Tim.
i. 10.

Tit. i.
12, 13.

Phil. iii.
8.

Thus they also, to whom to live is Christ, are upon good grounds established in their belief of the truth and excellency

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of his religion, though not in the miraculous way in which he convinced St. Paul. They see the want a world lost in ignorance, superstition, and vice, was in of Christ, to turn them from darkness to light. Their reason discerns and approves the excellency of his precepts, and the admirable tendency of his doctrines, to form men to the noblest conceptions of the Deity, the most exalted love to him, and a resemblance of his moral perfections. Sensible of their frailty and guilt, they esteem it *a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners; and to bless them by turning every one from his iniquities.* They rejoice in his offers of pardon, and divine assistance; and bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. With pleasure also they observe this revelation, which hath all the internal characters of truth and excellency they can desire, confirmed by signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost; and that to the reality of these facts, they have the testimony of eye and

1 Tim. i.
15.

Acts iii.
26.

1 Pet. i.
3, 4, 5.

Heb. ii.
4.

ear witnesses, who sacrificed every worldly interest to this testimony, and sealed it with their blood. Convinced therefore that God hath all possible claim to their faith and obedience, and that he hath appointed *Jesus* to be the *light of the world*, the *Saviour* and the *Lord of all*, and that the offers he makes them in the name of God are infinitely advantageous, they have heartily embraced them; repenting of their former sins, and resolving to make the gospel of Christ their rule of life, as the happiness he promiseth to the obedient is their highest hope and most desired portion.

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John i. 1.

It is granted, all sincere christians do not apprehend the evidences and excellence of christianity in an equal degree; but then, other things being equal, in proportion to the clearness and strength of their conviction of its truth and value, will be their concern to live to Christ. Those honest persons also who least distinctly discern its evidences, yet by the agreement of its doctrines and precepts with the uncorrupted sense of their minds, and its experienced fitness and energy to form them to true goodness, and prepare them for a rational and divine felicity, are determined firmly to believe it, and chearfully and steadily to practise its rule; this is all strictly necessary for them. But for those who desire to live extensively for Christ, to recommend

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and promote the faith and practice of his religion among men, it is greatly necessary that they themselves first clearly apprehend the proofs of its truth and excellence, and heartily and judiciously approving its divine tendency, be ready to render to others a good reason of the hope that is in them. Being thus convinced of the advantage of their Master's service, they will more strongly and successfully persuade others to enter into it, and persevere. If our faith be thus founded on a rock, it will stand the assault of temptation and persecution, and our zeal will be, not a short-lived passion, but a steady vigorous principle, and its flame always kept alive, by the known truth and value of the religion for which we are zealous; without this we shall most probably prove inconstant, or, which is as bad, be zealous for groundless opinions and useless fancies and practices of our own, or our party, rather than for the genuine important truths, and noble duties and virtues revealed and taught by Christ our great Master.

2. They to whom *to live is Christ*, steadily govern their temper and actions by the rules of his religion; and their faith in him works by love, and overcomes the world. They don't satisfy themselves with crying, *Lord, Lord*, making a zealous profession

Gal. v. 6.

John v. 4.

Mat. vii.

21.

profession of his religion, and contending for his honour, but *do the things he hath commanded.* Thus St. Paul kept under his body, and brought it into subjection; he was crucified with Christ to the world, and lived by the faith of the Son of God. He could appeal to the elders of Ephesus, that he had coveted no man's silver or gold; esteeming it more blessed to give than to receive; that he had served the Lord with all humility of mind. Yea, he could call God to witness, how holily, justly, and unblameably, he behaved among them that believed. And not thinking himself to have attained, forgetting those things that were behind, he pressed forward to perfection. And thus all, to whom to live is Christ, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, his temper and spirit, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof. As Christ hath revealed his Father to them in a light most amiable, they love the Lord their God with all their hearts, and souls, and strength; cherish a sense of his presence and benefits, by daily prayer and praise; praying without ceasing, and in every thing giving thanks; they commend themselves in all their ways to God in well doing; cast all their care upon him, believing all things will work together for good to them that love God; and they rejoice, in hope of his glory, and study to

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John xv.

14.

1 Cor. ix.

27.

Gal. ii.

20.

Acts xx.

19.

1 Theff.

ii. 10.

Phil. iii.

12, 13.

Rom.

xiii. 14.

Mat.

xxii. 37.

Theff v.

17, 18.

1 Pet. v.

7.

Rom.

viii. 28.

v. 2.

SERMON *be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect.*
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Mat. v.
48.

Eph. vi.
1---9.

Phil. ii.
4, 5.

2 Tim.
i 10.

1 Cor.
ix. 25.

1 Pet. ii.
11.

2 Cor.
vii. 1.
John iii.
2, 3.

As Christ hath given them a pattern of a most extensive benevolence, and unwearyed goodness, and encouraged their imitation by the prospect of an eternal reward, they esteem it their great concern in life to do good, and to their power make all around them happy, by the best discharge of every relative duty, and the best improvement of all their advantages for usefulness. *They look not on their own things only, but on the things of others also; and the same mind is in them which also was in Christ Jesus.* Christ hath brought life and immortality to light, and hath assured them of a rational and divine felicity in heaven, where the low indulgencies of sense and appetite find no place; *they are therefore temperate in all things, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; and judge their chief business in life to be, not the full gratification of their senses, but improving the purity of their minds, and their disposition for divine pleasures; cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God, and by the hope of seeing and enjoying him.* They do not content themselves with talking much of communion with God, but manifest they converse with him by growing like him in true goodness; and by

by a fixed regard to him, and his will, in their whole behaviour. They do not satisfy themselves with expressing a great zeal for the name and person of *Christ*, but prove they have a real veneration of his excellencies by resembling him, and a hearty zeal for his religion by obeying it. They do not content themselves with barely talking of the vanity of the world, and the blessedness of heaven; but in their whole conduct shew a contempt of the world, in comparison of the satisfactions of devotion, integrity and doing good. By a chearful practice of the greatest instances of a necessary self-denial, they prove their happiness to be in heaven; and by an abounding charity according to their abilities, lay up treasure there; and the constant composure and chearfulness of their spirits, amidst the changes of the present life, make it appear, they think these trials *not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed*; and are pleased they can make them work for their eternal good.

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Rom.
viii. 18.

3. They to whom to live is *Christ*, heartily endeavour to spread in the world the belief and practice of his religion. This was the great business of *St. Paul's* life after his conversion, *to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they might receive the remission*

Acts
xxvi. 18.

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remission of their sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Christ. This in a peculiar manner is the business of the ministers of the gospel; yet not so peculiar to them, but that all true lovers of Christ are inclined and obliged, according to their abilities, to advance his cause amongst men. They know his religion is fited to serve the greatest happiness of all, both in this life, and for eternity; *that he died for all*, and that the holiness and happiness of mankind are his reward; as therefore they love their Saviour, and like him are lovers of mankind, they cannot but endeavour he should be glorious, and rewarded in their holiness and happiness. For this purpose the sincerely devoted to Christ are studious to learn *his will, and his truth; they call no man Master, since one is their Master, even Christ*; they are not blindly devoted to the authority of any human guides, or the established notions of any party; but it is their honest and diligent endeavour to know the genuine doctrines and precepts of Christ, and then honestly and openly to recommend them, though they may not agree with the traditions and commandments of men.

2 Cor. v.
15.
1st. liii. 10.
12.
John
xvii. 2.

Mat.
xxiii. 10.

They do not look into the scriptures with a fixed resolution to find there the favourite tenets of a party, and to force thence

thence passages and authorities to confirm them; but it is their earnest desire, *teach me thy way, O Lord, shew me thy truth—and I will hear what Christ the Lord says.* SERMON XIV.

Human phrases and notions, consecrated by long use and authority, have no weight with them. *It is the faith once for all delivered to the saints,* they would discover and embrace; and it is this, when found, they endeavour with a zeal answerable to the importance of its several articles, to recommend to the world, whether popular or not. They know if they please men, at the expence of the truths Christ hath taught, *they are not then his servants; and that of them who are ashamed of Christ and his words before men, of them will the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* Jude 3.

Have notions then prevailed which he apprehends dishonourable to God, and destructive of his moral perfections, contrary to the abounding grace of the gospel, and the general strain of Christ's religion; and which appear to him in their consequences destructive of the love of God and mankind, and of the chief motives to holiness, which are the distinguishing excellence of his religion; though these errors and corruptions may have been long established, and become venerable by the numbers and characters of those who may have implicitly

Gal. i. 10.

Mat. viii. 38.

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citly and incautiously espoused them, all this can have no weight with him who heartily loves Christ, to bias his judgment, or hinder his profession of the truth.

The honour of God and of Christ are dearer to him than his own reputation, or the credit of any party or number of men, or than his worldly interest. He had rather, like *Elijah*, be persecuted with the few zealous for the uncorrupted religion of Jesus, than by prophesying smooth things, and countenancing established prejudices, make his court to the great or the multitude. *He keeps back nothing that is profitable, and shuns not to declare the whole counsel of God.* Like *St. Paul*, who feared not to oppose *St. Peter*, when he would have departed from the simplicity and liberty of the gospel, he is above being prevailed upon by the credit or friendship of the best and greatest, against the honour and truths of his Master. Having found the truth as it is in Jesus, his next concern is to recommend it in the best manner to others, and ingage them to believe his doctrines, and obey his precepts. For this purpose, as he believes the religion of Jesus worthy an infinitely wise and good God, and suited to the nature of man as reasonable, and consequently all its doctrines reasonable, and its duties tending to advance the perfection and happiness of mankind;

mankind; he endeavours to place it in this light before others, to ingage their firm belief, hearty approbation, and chearful practice. Reason assures us God is infinitely good, the gospel represents him in this most amiable light, as *love itself*; in this light therefore he represents him, as *willing that all men be saved*, and loving the world, more than he loved the life of his own Son. Christ gave himself *for the life of the world*, he therefore represents him as *the Saviour of all men*. Christ declares *his yoke is easy, and his burden light*; of this he would convince men, by shewing the immediate connection of every christian virtue when practised, with present as well as everlasting happiness.

Reason assures us all truths are consistent, and he is certain Christ cannot contradict himself, he therefore studies to propound the doctrines of the gospel in a light, that may shew them all conspiring in one great end, the honour of God in the immortal perfection and happiness of men. He can never think it for the honour of Christ to say his religion is unreasonable; he will never therefore load the faith of others with unreasonable notions as the doctrines of Christ. Being well acquainted with the great evidences of the gospel, he sets them before others in the best light he can, with love, and in the spirit of meekness,

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1 John
iv. 16.

1 Tim.
ii. 4.

John ii.
2, 4, 9,
10.
John vi.
51.
Mat. xi
30.

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meekness, applying himself to their reason, not their passions and weakness. And that the best religion may not be disgraced by an unsuitable behaviour, but that its excellency may be seen, as well as believed, he recommends it by a good example. Being more solicitous to gain persons to true goodness, to an imitation of the piety, meekness, humility, benevolence, heavenly-mindedness, and the like virtues of his Master, than to the opinions and distinguishing practices of any sect; he endeavours his own life may manifest his conviction of the worth and importance of these qualities, and be an inviting representation of them; to make his *light shine before men*, and lead *others to glorify God*, and obey Christ. His piety is rational, fervent, and uniform, free from sourness and censoriousness, from gloomy superstition, or mad enthusiasm. His christian charity is real and extensive; *he loves not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth*. He steadily governs every passion, abhors not only unjust but mean actions; and approves himself the friend of God and Christ, by being the friend of mankind. Thus to promote the religion of Jesus is the duty of all his disciples; and would they promote it most extensively, they cannot better do it, than by being exemplary for those virtues; for this will
render

1 John
iv. 19.

1 John
iii. 18.

render their good advice, and reasonings, and persuasions, irresistible with others.

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4. They to whom *to live is Christ*, not only attend to the promoting his religion and interest in some degree, but it is the prevailing concern, and delightful employment of life. This was St. Paul's temper and character; after he became a christian, his life was wholly devoted to it, he laboured *most abundantly*, sacrificed friends, reputation, wealth, and every worldly interest to it; and declares, that if his death might promote it, he should rejoice and glory in the sacrifice. And thus also the true christian Minister does not apply himself to the study of the scriptures, and the recommending the truths they contain, in such a degree only as is consistent with his pursuits of wealth, pleasure, or popular favour; but his unwearied study, his earnest prayer, his constant endeavours are directed to this, the discovering the great and noble truths of Christ's religion in all their evidence, and in their native simplicity, and thus propounding them to others, though it may cost him what the men of *fleshly wisdom* most value. To grow in the knowledge and practice of religion, not to grow in riches, is his great aim; and to gain men to the truth *as it is in Jesus*, and to substantial *goodness*, not fix them to his own interest or party, his earnest desire and labour.

1 Cor.
xv. 10.

2 Cor.
xi. 23.
Phil. ii
17.

In

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In chusing his station for life, the true christian considers, not, in what way shall I most indulge my ease, raise my fortune, and the like; but in what way best secure my own integrity, and a religious temper, and improve in it, and most promote in the world the honour of Christ, that is, the practice of true goodness. Will the taking such an advantage in business, if barely consistent with justice, yet appear mean and dishonourable, disgrace my christian profession, and lessen my influence for serving my Master? I will sacrifice this gain to his honour. It will also be a peculiar part of their concern as parents and heads of families, to cherish the principles of true religion and virtue in those under their care; to watch the most favourable opportunities, to insinuate these into the tender minds of children, to encourage every appearance of a good disposition, and suppress the contrary; and early to form them to the love and practice of pure religion, and substantial virtue, which the Apostle calls *forming Christ in them*; will be their delightful employment, preferred before parties and conversations of mere pleasure, and nearer their hearts, than the temporal prosperity and happiness of their children.

Gal iv.
19.

5. In order to their acting thus steadily and chearfully in those various instances,

ces, they keep Christ in view as their great pattern. *Be followers of me*, said our Apostle, *as I am of Christ*. So intent was Christ on promoting the holiness and happiness of men, that for this purpose he came down from heaven, *put off the form of God, and took on him the form of a servant*. They behold this unparalleled instance of zeal for God and goodness, with the highest admiration, and learn from it, to sacrifice the pleasures of sense, the show of life, or the wealth of the world, to the same design. Jesus when upon earth *shuned not to declare the whole counsel of God*, though the Pharisees hated and persecuted him for it. He disregarded ease and wealth, and refused an offered kingdom, wholly intent on promoting truth and goodness; nor could small apparent success, or the worst treatment, discourage him. They contemplate this unwearied zeal and patience of the Son of God, and learn from him to fix it as their great concern in life, to be and to do good, and chearfully to undergo reproach and sufferings for the sake of truth and righteousness.

The great scope of our Saviour's preaching was, not to make men exact in meats and drinks, in washings and external observances, or zealous for abstruse and unintelligible speculations; but to form his

U

hearers

SERMON
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1-Cor.
xi. 1.

Joha iii.
17.

Phil. ii.
6.

John vi.
15.

Mat. v.
6, 7.

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Mat.

xxii. 36.

xix. 16,

30.

Luke xii.

&c.

Heb. xii.

2, 3.

Phil. i.

21.

Rom.

viii. 11.

Rom. vi.

5.

2 Cor.

iv. 10.

hearers to the *love of God, and of mankind*, to a greatness of soul superior to the pleasures or afflictions of life, and a constant endeavour to lay up treasures in heaven by an abounding beneficence, and an increasing purity. They learn from him to place the main stress on these same virtues, and make it their great business to cherish and establish them in their own hearts, and promote them in others. Christ after he had lived in this manner, and spent his time in promoting truth and holiness, and making all within his influence happy; when continuing this course exposed him to ignominy and death, *endured the cross, despising the shame*; they look unto Jesus, and learn from him to *indure the contradiction of sinners*, without *being weary or fainting*. They are not disheartened, because the rewards of piety and obedience are not granted in this life; but after a life of labour and usefulness, and of ill treatment, can cheerfully lay down their bodies in the dust, assured that when their souls *depart hence they are with Jesus*; and that *he, who raised up Christ from the dead, will also quicken their mortal bodies*; and that if they have been conformed to the active goodness, and patient virtue of the Redeemer, they shall be also conformed to his resurrection and glory.—Let this suffice for a sketch of their character, whether ministers or private christians,

christians, of whom it may be said, to *them* SERMON
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to live is Christ. I am,

II. To show you what *gain* death is to persons of this character. And among other advantages, by dying they gain the following.

I. They are established in goodness, and fully assured of the unchangeable favour of God, and of Christ. This life is a continued scene of trial, temptation, and danger; but death ends the state of trial, removes the true christian far from temptation, introducing him *to the spirits of just men made perfect.* St. Paul could not think himself out of danger while he lived, but he *strove, and watched, and prayed, and kept under the body; lest, while he preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away.* And he did not think himself to have fully attained, or to be *already perfect.* 'Tis true the more improved any are in piety and holiness, by so much more are they raised above danger from temptations, and more established in goodness; yet they are not out of danger, and, *he that stands, must take heed lest he fall.* The opposition and hazard arising from the appetites and passions rooted in the animal body is quite removed by death dissolving the union, and the separate spirit, in which pious and virtuous habits were before fixed, and prevailing, having now no contrary inclinations remaining, with

Heb.
xii: 23.

1 Cor.
ix. 25.

Phil. iii.
12.

1 Cor.
x. 21.

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1 Cor.
xiii. 10.

Heb. xii.

23.
Mat. v.

8.
2 Cor.
v. 8.

2 Cor. v.
10.

Heb. ix.
27.

its intire will chuses and practises what is best; what God approves, and Christ will infinitely reward, and can no longer feel any temptation in vice. The temptations arising from ill examples, from the persuasions or contradiction of sinners, are quite abolished by death, which transmits the servant of Christ, to kindred spirits, made perfect in knowledge and goodness; to the friendship and conversations of the holy angels, and to the immediate presence of God, and the Redeemer, where every conversation, every thing the soul sees or knows, contribute to increase and establish the love of holiness, and render him most happy in its perfect exercise. The strength of the soul is now employed no more in resisting temptations, and keeping under opposite dispositions, but the contemplation and love of God and the Redeemer, the knowledge, esteem, and practice of whatever is excellent and amiable, engage the whole strength of the soul, and render it as happy as it is holy. Holiness is their reward, their trial no longer; for *they receive according to what they have done in the body; and after death is the judgment.*

To be fully assured of the unchangeable love and approbation of God and the Redeemer, is infinite gain to them. What pleasure can be compared with the pleasure of conscious goodness, even in the present life,

life, cheered with a good hope of the divine complacency? To think that the Lord of the universe, an all-wise, almighty, and infinitely beneficent Being, approves and delights in us; and that his Son, to whom we owe so much, accepts our returns, and we are, though in an imperfect degree, possess of qualities, which render us amiable in the sight of God! He hath not known true satisfaction, who hath not known this; and he who hath enjoyed this, hath enjoyed a pleasure the world cannot equal. Yet in the present state conscious imperfection, our many instances of folly and vice, and the inconstancy of our good resolutions, very much weaken our assurance of the divine favour, and we rejoice with trembling. But who can imagine the transport of joy that will overflow the pious soul, when appearing before God at the end of his probation? He shall beyond all possible doubt be assured of the full approbation of God, that he is thought by God fit for eternal happiness, and by him admitted to a state, where he shall never be able to do any thing but what renders him amiable in his eyes—When he shall be *presented to the Father without spot*, and hear his well-beloved Son pronounce, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Surely death is infinite gain which clears our way to this

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Mat.
XXV. 21.

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happiness. Who would not die to be thus happy?

2. They who have lived to Christ, gain this farther by death, to have every thing from without disagreeable in their service of Christ removed, and find it all pure satisfaction and happiness. There is a real and a noble satisfaction, not only in cultivating true goodness in ourselves, but in heartily endeavouring also to advance it in others; thus to make the most grateful return to God and the Redeemer for their love to us, and to promote a most excellent design, the perfect happiness of immortal beings. This satisfaction hath great allays in the present life. The slow success at best of our endeavours to do good, and the numerous instances of those who defeat all our kind designs towards them, and continue enslaved to sin, under the sentence of eternal destruction, deeply affect the servants of Christ; who like their Master *would have all men to be saved*, and all rise to degrees of holiness worthy their christian profession. Death is greatly the gain of such, by putting an everlasting end to this uneasiness. They are admitted to a society where all their endeavours to communicate knowledge, and animate devotion or goodness, are intirely successful. Would they communicate to minds of an inferior order any noble discoveries of the divine perfections and

and works? They are in the best disposition to receive them, and feel their influence, and rise by them to a more exalted love and veneration of the Deity. They see all the members of their glorious society, *holy and happy as they wish them*, and continually advancing in holiness and happiness. They also now see clearly, that God will make all happy who are any way fit for blessedness, and all the partial fondnesses and affections of mortality are lost in a rational benevolence, and an intire acquiescence in the determinations of infinite wisdom and goodness.

The doubts that attend many important truths, and the clouds that now hang over God's dispensations to the world and the church, occasion frequently great uneasiness to the servants of Christ here, and death is greatly their *gain* by clearing all these. Now, *they know in part, but then they know as they are known*. And, *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. All the great and noble truths that relate to the perfections, providence, and government of God, the dignity of his Son, and the salvation of the world by him, appear in all their evidence and beauty; faith is exchanged for sight, and doubt and darkness are no more. Who that knows the delight of contemplating sublime and important truths, and the pain of doubting, can question

1 Cor.
xiii. 12.
Mat. v.
8.

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whether this be great gain? Now happy are they also in clearly seeing the wisdom and goodness of all the divine measures and dispensations, they at present implicitly believe to be wise and good.

The wide spread of imposture and heathenism, the general and established corruptions of christianity by superstition and popery, the oppression and persecution of true religion almost every where, and the small appearing number of the faithful servants of Christ, these events perplex the minds of his friends now, when they seriously think of them. But in the other world they see that all power was really in the hands of Christ; that by the best methods, though to us unsearchable, he now carries on his grand design, the holiness and immortal happiness of all of our race who are fit to be made happy; and they triumph in the certain prospect, and near approach of that period, when the interests of Christ, of truth and goodness, shall universally prevail, *and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.* To have a certain assurance of this glorious event, and clearly to see what we now think most opposite, so directed as to prepare the way for it, how transporting the pleasure to all who love truth, who love God, and Christ, and mankind! And how greatly is death their gain which introduces them to this; and

Rev. xi.
15.

and which while they are perhaps employed SERMON
XIV. in advancing these great events in the best manner, gives them to see their continual successful progress, and the certainty of their full accomplishment! How did our Apostle rejoice, when by the spirit of prophecy, he, tho' obscurely, foresaw the *fullness of the Gentiles*, and the *general conversion and salvation of Israel*; and with what extasy does he cry out, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, of whom, and to whom, and through whom are all things*, and to whom will be everlasting glory from all! With how much greater transport does he, with all the spirits of just men made perfect, contemplate those scenes of Providence in the clear light of heaven?

Rom. xi.
23.

3. True christians gain this by dying, to be with Christ in the immediate presence of God. This St. Paul declares a great part of the advantage he expected from dying. *I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.* And thus also he tells the *Corinthians*, *that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; and are therefore willing rather to be absent from the body, and at home with the Lord.* How great this happiness none can fully conceive but they who possess it. That it must indeed be very great, all who love their Saviour in any de-

2 Cor. v.
6.

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degree can easily conceive.—To *behold him face to face, whom now having not seen they love*; to behold the Son of God, the lover and Saviour of mankind, seated on the divine throne, at God's right-hand, with a majesty and glory worthy the only-begotten of the Father, clothed in a human body, the body, once mortal, which he assumed to save us from the greatest misery, and raise us to the highest happiness; the body, in which, for our sakes, he suffered cold, heat, hunger, weariness, pain, the reproaches of men, the agony of the garden, and the torture of the cross; but glorious now as it was once mean, and as was his condescension, infinitely glorious; to see him crowned with divine honours, transcendently blessed, transcendently amiable; to worship, with the highest veneration, and the most transporting gratitude and joy before the throne, and own the infinite debt of love with a gratitude and devotion worthy the distinct apprehensions we shall then have of his dignity and condescension, his surprising love to us, and the everlasting felicity to which he hath raised us!

Who would not part with all this world calls delightful or lovely for an hour's enjoyment of this? Who but must esteem death greatly their gain, whom it introduces to this glorious presence of Christ, and whom it joins to myriads of angels, and of his redeemed, who *with golden harps and heavenly*

venly songs celebrate the exalted Saviour, and ascribe salvation, glory, honour and blessing to him that siteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. The pleasures of acknowledging with a warmth of devotion the greatness of the love of God in Christ, and the love of Jesus, are some of the greatest pleasures of this life; but how much greater will be the joy, when faith shall be changed into sight, and our imperfect apprehensions into perfect knowledge? And how happy he, who by death hath exchanged the most exalted devotion of the present state for the worship and love of angels and glorified spirits? Could the whole world purchase their return to mortality, who enjoy this in heaven, and who together with Christ behold the face of God?

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Rev. v. 8.

Christ sits on his Father's throne, at his right-hand. As the discovery God hath made of himself to the world in Christ, is among the most glorious and amiable discoveries of his perfections, and the designs of God are intimately connected, so the knowledge of God is included in the knowledge of Christ; and to apprehend this last completely, there must be a discovery made us of other designs and effects of the divine wisdom, power, and goodness. Our fleshly bodies now separate us from an ever-present God; but this veil once drawn aside, the pure mind is immediately conscious to his pre-

Rev. iii,
21.
Rom.
viii. 34.

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presence, sees God, apprehends his presence and perfections in as clear and strong a manner as we perceive the presence and beauties of a person we behold. Most happy they who thus see God! How inestimable their gain in death! Clearly to apprehend, and suitably to adore and love a God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, the author and giver of an infinity of good; the God who made us for immortal blessedness, who redeemed us at the price of his Son's blood, and is now entring us on the possession of that divine and everlasting felicity, which is the fruit of the Son's death, and the Father's love! Heaven is begun with such a one immediately, on dropping the body before he reaches the majestic presence of God, and his happiness there rises and grows continually, by the continually new discoveries he makes in the divine perfections and works, by the full and eternal assurances of the divine complacency, and the continual exercises of the most exalted admiration, love, gratitude, and intire devotedness to God. Be this my happiness, and take the world who will. Let death conduct me to this, and whenever it approaches it will be welcome*.

4. Death is their gain who have lived to Christ, as it joins them to the best company, to *angels*, and the *spirits of just men made*

Heb. xii.
23.

* Here the Sermon may be divided.

made perfect. The Apostle mentions this as SERMON. XIV. part of the christian's happiness, and it is a very valuable part. It is natural for those who love Christ, to love and delight in those who love and resemble him, are devoted to him, and beloved by him. *In the saints and excellent of the earth*, says David, Psal. xvi. 3. *is all my delight*; how much greater will be our delight in the saints and angels in heaven?

The angels are described in Scripture, as Psal. ciii. 20. Luke ii. 9. Heb. i. 14. Rev. v. 11. glorious, wise, powerful, beneficent, and condescending; devoted to the will of God and of Christ, ready to the kindest offices to us, &c. though much beneath them, and *ministring spirits to the heirs of salvation.* What satisfactions will the society and friendship of such beings yield us, when we are prepared for their company! The most extensive knowledge and consummate wisdom, tempered with equal goodness and condescension, prevail in their conversations. With what pleasure may we learn from them innumerable plans of the divine wisdom and love, in executing which they have been concerned, some of them peculiarly relating to ourselves. This was the wise, and kind, and watchful guardian, that preserved me from such a danger, turned off such a temptation which might have ruined me, or threw in my way such an opportunity for doing good, which is now so richly

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richly rewarded. Admiration, love, gratitude, the most agreeable affections of the soul, must reign in such society. What advances in divine knowledge may we make with them, who have spent so many thousand years in the court of heaven, been employed in the largest and most beneficent designs of the Deity; and who are masters of the philosophy of nature, and have ranged over the creation? They who have a strong desire of knowledge, and who have been happy in the conversation and friendship of a great genius, whose superior knowledge was accompanied with the most obliging condescension, and who used his superiority not to insult our ignorance, but to give us discoveries and pleasures we must otherwise have wanted; they may guess something of the happiness a conversation with angels will yield, when we shall find ourselves, after every converse, more wise, divine, and happy.

Death will introduce us also to the society and friendship of *just spirits made perfect*, of the best men of all ages and nations, and of our best friends; those whom we have most esteemed and loved, whose conversation was amongst our greatest pleasures on earth, and will, on account of their great improvements, be much more our happiness in heaven. To see and converse with

Luke xvi.
22.

Abraham, Moses, Job, David, Isaiah, Daniel,
with

with the apostles; and most distinguished christians, and good men of every age, and our pious relations and friends, whose loss we have mourned, and whom to meet again, so much improved, will give a transport of pleasure. The most important truths, and the noblest wonders of the divine hand, are the subjects of their discourse, and treated in a worthy manner. Pure disinterested love animates every breast; superior knowledge is without pride, and inferior without envy. All distinctions of sects and opinions cease for ever, and truth and goodness are the alone concern and delight of all. To give and receive fresh degrees of knowledge, love, devotion, and happiness, is the employ of every hour of conversation, which never flags or grows indifferent. How happy they whom death admits into this society, and, which is the case of those who have lived any time in the world, find more of their friends got before them thither than are left behind; and who are welcomed to this blissful world by many whose piety and virtue they have assisted, to whose eternal felicity they have greatly contributed, and in whose friendship and happiness therefore they enjoy a superior felicity! * *Cicero* describes *Cato* in perfect rapture at the hope of entering, after death, into the society of those

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* *De Senectute*—O præclarum diem, &c.

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great and good men he had known or read of. "O glorious Day, says he, when I shall get out of this sink of vice, and from this rabble, and join that divine assembly of noble minds! For I shall go not only to those good men I before mentioned, but to my *Son*, than whom I never knew a better man; whose Funeral I attended, when, according to the order of nature, he should have attended mine. —And would some God grant me to grow young again, I would absolutely refuse the gift, being happily got so near the end of my race, and an eternal settlement." If a heathen, amidst such obscure notices of a future state, could thus talk of death as his advantage, for introducing him to such good men as he knew, with how much stronger reason may christians conclude death their gain, who know so much better company awaits them there, as well better men, as spirits of a higher order, angels and seraphims, *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*. But I must not farther indulge myself on this copious and pleasing subject; enough hath been offered to prove that death is greatly *their gain, to whom to live was Christ*. I shall therefore,

Dan. vii.
10.

III. Briefly show the connection between this character, and this happiness;
between

between *living to Christ*, and finding *death* our gain. SERMON
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I. THEY are closely connected in the nature of things. When to us to *live* hath been *Christ*, this, by a natural influence, prepares us to find *death* our gain. Of them who, by the faith of the gospel, and in imitation of *Christ*, endeavour to perfect holiness in themselves, and promote it in others, it may be said to live is *Christ*; and the happiness they gain by dying, arises; in a great degree, out of the perfection of holiness. They who, in opposition to the appetites and passions of the animal life, have cherished a prevailing love to God, and *Christ*, and true goodness, are in their temper disposed, when all these hindrances are removed, to enjoy, in perfection, the pleasures of devotion and goodness, as much as a strong healthful person is to run a race with pleasure, when his fetters are knocked off. They who have been greatly delighted in doing good, strongly concerned for the honour of the divine government; and the interests of *Christ*, and perplexed by those clouds which hang over the divine dispensations; they are in their temper prepared to enjoy the most exalted satisfactions from clear discoveries of the wisdom and goodness of the divine counsels, and their certain success, notwithstanding contrary appearances. And they whose chief satisfactions in

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life

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life have arisen from meditations on the perfections and works of God, from veneration, love, gratitude, joy and hope in him, and in his Son, and from the conversation and friendship of the wise and good; they are in the very constitution of their souls disposed to enjoy divine pleasures from the immediate glorious presence of God and our Saviour, from the worship, and love, and praises of the heavenly state, from the conversations and friendships of angels and perfected minds, and the continual improvements to be made amidst such company, in knowledge, devotion, and friendship. A wise and good God delights to communicate happiness to his creatures, according to their capacities for it; they therefore who, in obedience to his commands, have cultivated a temper of soul for enjoying a rational and divine happiness in his presence, cannot fail of being admitted to it; his wise goodness cannot but delight to reward them with it; *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* You might as well suppose a wise and good parent, after he had with great care and expence prepared a son to fill up well a great and good character in life, to deny him that situation in which he might, to the best advantage, answer the care and expence of his education, as God not to receive those to happiness, and make death their gain, whom thro' life, by his Gospel, his Providence, and his

his Spirit, he had been preparing, and actually prepared, to possess the felicity of his heavenly kingdom.

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2. BY the wise appointment, and express declarations of God in his word, these two are connected, *living to Christ*, and finding *death* our gain. Be not deceived, says St. Paul, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. You might as well hope to reap without sowing, or to reap wheat when you have sown tares, as to enjoy a spiritual and divine happiness, when you have lived to the flesh. But on the contrary, God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love. But to a patient continuance in well-doing, will render glory, honour, and immortality. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And we must receive at last according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or bad. He that doth righteousness is righteous, as God is righteous. And if we are conformed to the likeness of our Saviour's death, we shall be also to his resurrection. Blessed, therefore, are the dead who die in the Lord, they rest from their labours, and their works follow them. Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter thro' the gates of pearl

Gal. vi.
7, 8.

Heb. vi.
10.
Rom. ii.
7.
Heb. xii.
14.
2 Cor. v.
10.
1 John
iii. 7.

Rom. vi.
5.
Rev. xiv.
13.

Ib. xxii.
14.

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James i.

2, 3.

1 Pet. i.

7.

into the heavenly city. I must transcribe a great part of the New Testament, if I would cite all the proofs of this truth. God hath appointed this to be a state of trial, and we are placed here amidst the pleasures and distractions of sense, and the temptations of the world; that by adhering to God and goodness, by preferring the pleasures of loving and serving our Saviour, and a resemblance to him in devotion, purity, and goodness, before the interests or pleasures of sense or sin, we might manifest the strength of our love to God, and Christ, and goodness, and grow in it, and thus be qualified for the reward of an approved piety and virtue. This God hath informed us is our present state, and correspondent to this is the frame of our nature, and of the world. We cannot think a wise and good God will act contrary to his express declarations, and to that constitution of things he hath, on the best reasons, established. We must therefore conclude, that they, and they only, *to whom to live is Christ, shall find death their gain.* That only they who, on a trial, have approved themselves, can *receive the crown of life*, and the obedient only the everlasting rewards of obedience. 'Tis true the work bears no proportion to the reward, which for greatness is proportioned to the infinite goodness of the giver, yet 'tis dispensed by a wise, as well as good, governour, suitably to the different

different qualifications and behaviour of his creatures. Would we then be crowned, let us approve ourselves on our trial; would we receive the reward of obedience, let us cheerfully and faithfully obey; would we all find *death our gain*, let us *all* live to Christ.

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I shall now close the subject with two or three Reflections.

I. As for applying this discourse to the death and character of our worthy Friend, I presume you have done it already; and the manifest resemblance of his character, in the principal instances with that which makes the first part of this Sermon, leaves us no room to doubt whether the blessedness described in the second be his. For this reason I shall not enlarge here, but content myself with just pointing out a few of the chief excellencies that distinguished him.

I will begin with that in him, which is the *beginning of wisdom*, and a principal part of moral worth, *piety*. His was rational and manly, arising out of a clear and strong conviction, and worthy apprehensions, of the being, perfections, and providence of God; and it exerted itself in a cheerful prevailing concern to please God in his whole conduct, particularly by imitating him in righteousness and goodness; like *St. Paul, having hope towards God that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, he exercised himself herein, to have always a conscience void of offence*

ACTSXXIV.

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offence towards God, and towards man. His integrity therefore was remarkable. Strictly just, and honestly plain, he knew to use a cautious prudence, keeping ever clear of low artifice and dissimulation; in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, having his conversation in the world.

He was a wise, a hearty, and a firm friend; and, without humboring a weakness, or flattering a vice, was candid, zealous, and constant.

As a minister of Christ, he showed his great regard for his Master, and deserves our imitation in a diligent and impartial endeavour to know his truth and his will, and then to recommend these, and these only, to his hearers. He *walked not in craftiness, neither did he handle the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* He sought for christianity in the scriptures, by a critical and constant study of them, and by earnest prayer. These were the standard of his faith and practice, and by these he tried the creeds, and systems of fallible men. He did not, as the manner of too many is, first settle his faith by the favourite opinions of a party, and then read the scriptures with a disposition to see nothing in them which would not agree with these; but without regard to these, he endeavoured to find the genuine sense of the

2 Cor. iv.
2.

sacred

sacred writings, and by this tried the truth of opinions he had before embraced, or that were afterward recommended. This impartial study of the scriptures, joined with a solid judgment, and an honest heart, and succeeded by the divine blessing, qualified him to recommend, to advantage, the best religion to his hearers; and the great design of his preaching, was the same with that for which *the grace of God appeared bringing salvation, to teach men, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* You who heard him constantly, know he did not recommend abstruse speculations, enthusiastic fallies, or the trifling distinctions of a party, and strive to raise a warm zeal for these; but his aim in preaching was to bring you to the love of God, and *the love of mankind*; to that repentance which is *unto life*, evidencing itself in *ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well*; to an intire subjection of soul to Christ's authority and laws, and *that love to him* which manifests itself in imitating his virtues, and obeying his precepts, and to *that faith in Christ* which makes us *victorious over the world*, encouraging us to expect the reward of eternal life through his death and resurrection, by patiently continuing

Tit. ii.
11-13.

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tinuing in well-doing—clearly to explain, and solidly enforce, the great principles and duties of practical religion; that religion which makes us happy in ourselves, and blessings to all around us; like to God in justice, mercy, and truth here, and which prepares us for the highest happiness, in his immediate presence and perfect love, in heaven.—This was the great design of his ministerial labours, and seconded by his example.

Farther, he was a thorough and a consistent Dissenter. A regard to Christ as sole king and lord in his church; to the sacred scriptures as a perfect rule of faith and manners, and to the unalienable rights of conscience and private judgment, determined him to dissent from the *established* church, and reject their claims of authority in matters religious, and their additions to the faith and worship of the gospel. This same principle made him also reject equally like claims and additions made by those, who, dissenting from the national church, and without the countenance of the civil magistrate, pretend, with a very ill grace, to a power they condemn in others; and, self-condemned, invade those rights of conscience they maintain as sacred against the Establishment. As he disliked every thing of an imposing temper in others, he kept clear of it himself; he *stood fast in the liberty*

erty wherewith Christ had made him free, and abhorred to lord it over God's heritage; allowing all the same liberty he took for himself, to examine and judge for themselves; and maintaining a great esteem and friendship for those who, in pursuance of this liberty, greatly differed from the sentiments he embraced as true.

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1Pet.v.3.

As to his general conversation, you, among whom he went in and out, preaching the kingdom of God, knew how holily, justly, and unblameably he behaved among you; and you know how intirely it was the design of his studies and labours, to form Christ in you, and ingage you to be intirely devoted to him. You cannot therefore doubt, tho' the nature of his distemper hindered his bearing his testimony, in the close of life, to the goodness of his Master, and of his service, and expressing his well grounded hope of the happiness promised to his servants, but that as he lived to the Lord, *he died in him,* and hath found death his exceeding gain.

The removal of such a Minister in the midst of his days and usefulness, should dispose his hearers to consider whether they *walked in the light whilst they had it,* and improved well the advantages they enjoyed by his ministry. They who have hitherto neglected to live to Christ, presuming on the long continuance of an uncertain life, should be taught by his death to delay no longer,

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longer, when they see the continuance of a well-improved life is not to be depended on. They should therefore immediately begin to live to Christ, that, if, like our Friend, surprized by death, it may yet be their gain. And farther, if the description given of a faithful Minister of Christ, under the first part of this discourse, be just, this Congregation may be directed by it in chusing a successor to our deceased Friend.

To us his Brethren in the ministry, the loss of so valuable a Friend, and such a faithful servant of Christ, and so soon after the removal of that great and good man *, for whom our tears are not yet dry, should prove a powerful excitement to exert ourselves to the utmost for supplying the loss the church and the world have sustained. Our time for labouring is, we see, of uncertain continuance, let us therefore live to Christ while we may. We have all desirable encouragement; 'tis to imitate the pattern of God's own Son incarnate; 'tis in the best manner to acknowledge our obligations to the most generous friend; 'tis to promote the favourite design of the divine government in our world; a design in itself most excellent, being the perfection and supreme felicity of immortal beings. The work therefore cannot be without its plea-

* The reverend, learned, and ingenious Mr. HENRY GROVE.

tures in the performance; and we are assured death will soon end all that is laborious and uneasy, and prove infinitely our gain, by introducing us to an infinite reward. If we live to the world, death will for ever remove us from our happiness; if we study to please men, we shall not be the servants of Christ, and shall certainly lose his reward; but if to promote true religion, and imitate the virtues of our Master, be the business of our lives, death will only end our labours, and admit us to a happiness, compared with which the whole world is a trifle, and compared to the duration of which, millions of ages are not so considerable as a moment compared to these. He that can find a better Master, let him serve him; he that cannot, let him serve Christ with a cheerfulness, diligence, and fidelity worthy our Master and his work; let him *live to Christ, and to die will be his gain.*

2. Is death gain to the true christian? Hence we learn, that the uncomfortable notion of the *sleep of the soul*, from death till the resurrection, hath no real foundation in scripture. Had St. Paul imagined any thing of this kind, he would never have called death his *gain*. He would rather have chosen to *live to Christ*, than to be wholly insensible; and he could never *desire to depart* that he might be *with Christ*, but after

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2 Cor. v.
6, &c.

Matt. x.
28.

Luke
xxiii. 43.

after such a manner that it would be all one as if he was at the greatest distance; and he would have been much more with him by living still here. He farther declares this to constitute the difference between being *in* the body, and *out* of it; that while *we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; but when absent from the body, at home with the Lord.* Whereas if the notion of the sleep of the soul was true, we should be much more at *home with Christ* in the body, than out of it. We are now capable of conversing with him in faith, and hope, and praise, and love, and of receiving communications of his favour; whereas all these would then be cut off in death. Farther, a greater than St. Paul hath informed us, they that *kill the body, cannot kill the soul*; whereas if the soul slept till the resurrection, as the body does, they would as effectually kill the soul as the body. He also promised the penitent thief on the cross, *To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* This must certainly imply he must be the happier for being there, and not be in the same insensible condition in paradise, with those who were out of it, and know no more of its blessedness than they who would never enter paradise. And this notion agrees less with sound reason and philosophy, than with scripture; for these demonstrate the *simplicity* and *natural immortality*

mortality of the soul, and its independance on the body. Let us therefore arm ourselves against the fear of dying, with the thought, that when *absent from the body, we are present with the Lord*; and comfort ourselves under the loss of our pious Friends, with this hope, that our loss is their gain; that when they are no longer with us, they are in infinitely better company, with God, and Christ, and angels, and the *spirits of just men made perfect*; whither too we, by an imitation of their good examples, may very soon hope to ascend.

3. As we desire to have death *our gain*, let us all resolve, that to us *to live* shall be *Christ*. There is no separating these two, which God hath joined together; no entering heaven without a temper suited to its divine felicity; no being happy in the presence and love of Christ, without resembling him in fervent piety, active goodness, purity, and a heavenly conversation. Let us then be persuaded, if we have not already done it, on a thorough consideration, to devote ourselves to his service, and ratify it in his Supper. Let us immediately break off all those vices which are opposite to his interest, and to destroy which he died. Let us apply immediately to the correcting the several vices of our tempers, *and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

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This life is the only season for doing it; and how frail and uncertain it is, need you be told? Does not the present instance convince you? If you devote life to the pursuits of wealth, pleasure, and a worldly felicity, besides that, guilty reflections, disappointment and vexation, will embitter your choice and happiness, supposing you succeed to the height of your wishes, yet death will certainly come; it will soon come and strip you of all, and what will you then do? You chose your portion in the world, and have now no portion, no hope in God, and no cheering expectations from eternity, but every thing to fear from the displeasure of a righteous and offended sovereign, for despising the heaven of eternal happiness he offered you, trampling on the blood of the covenant, and alienating what was every way his. Whereas if you devote yourselves to the service of God and the Redeemer, and to the obedience of his gospel, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, you will be happier throughout life than the world can make you; happy in conscious goodness, a sense of the divine favour, gratitude and hope in God, well-governed passions, and in the esteem and love of the wise and good, and in views still brightning of a glorious immortality; and when death comes, which is the loss of all good to the wicked, it will be your unspeakable gain. The religion of
Jesus

Jesus will make you victorious over the fears of death; with calmness, if not triumph, you will resign your departing spirits into the hands of Christ; vice, labour, suffering, will for ever end with regard to you; angels shall conduct your spirits to paradise, the smiles and approbation of God, and of his Son, shall then assure your eternal felicity. You shall there enjoy every pleasure worthy a pure immortal spirit, and joyfully expect the general judgment, when the resurrection of your bodies to glory and immortality, and the public approbation of your Judge, shall begin for you the perfection of blessedness, to be possessed, not for some thousands or millions of years only, but for eternity; and your happiness be as unchangeable and sure, as the eternal God your portion. Chuse you then, this day, whom you will serve, and may God direct and confirm us all in a right choice. *Amen.*



S E R M O N XV.

Our Times in the Hand of God.



P S A L M xxxi. 15.

My Times are in thy Hand.

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AMIDST the frailty of the present state, the uncertainty of our own lives, and of the lives of our dearest Friends, and the many sudden and disagreeable changes to which we are liable, there is no consideration so proper to calm and cheer the minds of the sincerely pious as this, with which *David*, in the words just read, comforts himself, in regard to the evils which threatened him. That our lives, and all the events of them, are subject to the direction and disposal of God, infinitely wise and good ;
who

who manages all natural causes, directs what we call chance and accident, and over-rules or restrains the thoughts and passions, and wickedness of men; who will permit nothing to befall his faithful servants, in life or death, but what shall prove, upon the whole, best for them; will be unto them *a sun and a shield, will give them grace and glory, and withhold no good thing; and when their flesh and heart fail them, be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever.*

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Psal:
lxxxiv. 11.
lxxiii. 26.

To this encouraging truth, I would therefore now call your thoughts, on occasion of the early, and what we are apt to think untimely death of our worthy Friend*; the divine Providence makes it peculiarly seasonable, and may the divine blessing make the consideration of it peculiarly profitable to us all. With this view,

I. I shall explain and prove the truth of the pious acknowledgment made by *David* unto God, *My Times are in thy Hand.* And,

II. Show you what instruction and encouragement we may derive from this truth.

I. I would briefly explain and prove the truth of this pious acknowledgment, which *David* makes unto God, *My Times are in thy Hand.* It is true of all

* MRS. MARY SLATER, wife of the Rev. Mr. SLATER, of CULLITON, 1752.

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mankind, that their *Times are in the Hand of God*, that they are entirely dependent upon him for life, and for happiness; and to their unspeakable advantage, it is peculiarly true of the pious and good, that all the events of their lives, and the time and circumstances of their deaths, are wisely directed and disposed by God, with the kindest designs of their happiness here and hereafter.

1 Chron.
xxix. 30.

Ecclef.
iii. 2.

According to the usual language of Scripture, by *our Times*, which are in the *Hand of God*, are meant, either the principal events of our lives; in which sense the word is used concerning *David, his Reign, and his Might, and the Times that went over him, and over Israel*; or else the length or shortness of them, and the time of our death. For as to every man there is *a time to be born*, there is also *a time to die*. And *David* having, in this *Psalms*, express great fears, lest his life should be a sacrifice to the malice and power of his enemies, when he comforts himself, that his *Times were in the Hand of God*, it is probable he had a principal regard to this great event, and piously confest to God, that however mighty and raging his enemies were, who sought his life, yet it was not left in their power to determine how long he should live; that the time of his death would be appointed, not by the will of his persecutors, but by the

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the wise and good pleasure of God, who would continue and guard his life, till it became best for him to die. I shall therefore explain and confirm this pious acknowledgment, as including both these senses, the principal events of life, and the time and manner of our death.

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1. Our *Times*, as they signify the principal events of our lives, either afflictive or prosperous, are in the *Hand of God*, or intirely subject to his most wise and good disposal. According to the Scriptures, which give us the grandest, as well as the most certain accounts of the Providence of God, *Whatsoever he pleaseth, that doth he, in heaven or in earth; working all things according to the counsel of his own will. Without him a sparrow falls not to the ground; and even the hairs of our head are numbered by him. From him cometh down every good, and every perfect gift; who maketh poor, and maketh rich; and who as he giveth, taketh away when he pleaseth; making use, as in the case of Job, alike of natural causes, evil Spirits, or evil men as his instruments. Afflictions therefore spring not from the dust; but are his fatherly corrections, who chastens not for his own pleasure, but for our profit. And the good things of life are not merely the fruits of our own industry, or of the kindness of others, much less are they to be ascribed to good fortune; but it is God*

Psal.
cxxxv.6.
Eph. i.
11.
Matt. x.
29.

James i.
17.
1 Sam. ii.
7.
Jobi. 22.
Job. v. 6.
Heb. xii.
10.

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1 Tim.
vi. 17.
Rom. ii.
4.
Prov.
xix. 14.

2 Sam.
xii. 10.
xvi. 11.

Rom.
viii. 28.

Mat. vi.
25.
1 Pet. v.
7.
Phil. iv.
6.

who giveth us all things to enjoy ; and the design of his goodness is to lead us to repentance, or to excite us to love, gratitude, and an imitation of his bounty.

A prudent wife, good children, and other good relations and friends are from the Lord. And if we are exercised or suffer by the vices, afflictions, or death of those who are near to us, or by the malice of enemies, God wisely permits, or overrules it, either by way of trial or punishment, as we learn from the history of David, and he himself acknowledges when Shimei cursed him. And to the sincerely pious and good, as far as they are such, health or sickness, riches or poverty, easy or afflictive circumstances are assigned by God, as he sees will, upon the whole, be best for them ; or at least are so dispensed, that if they are not greatly wanting to their duty, they shall be enabled to make them subservient to their highest happiness. *We know, says the Apostle, that all things work together for good to them that love God.* And as to events, the declarations and commands of Scripture excuse them from all anxious thought about these, directing them to *cast all their care upon God, who careth for them ;* and who, if they are mainly concerned to do their duty in whatever circumstances they are placed, if they seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,

righteousness, will add other things to them. In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, they may make known their requests unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. SRRMON
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This is a brief representation of the noble and animating view, which the Scriptures give us, of the part which the *Hand of God* has in all our affairs; a representation intirely agreeable to reason, and for the most part confirmed by it. Since,

I. As to natural causes, and their influence on our happiness, it is evident to reason, that the *Hand of God* does all; and that they can do nothing, but as instruments moved and guided by him. It is he causeth the Sun to rise, the vapours to fall, the winds to blow, and the earth to bring forth its fruits. Fire, air, earth, and water being all composed of particles in themselves destitute of life, thought, power, and even motion, can do nothing but what God, who moves and directs all, according to the wisest laws, pleases to effect by them. Healthful or sickly, fruitful or barren seasons, favourable or contrary winds, are alike his servants, who employs them as the moral Governor of free Beings; turning a healthful land into sickness, and *a fruitful land into barrenness,*

Psal.
cvii. 34.

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for the wickedness of them who dwell therein;
or rewarding a penitent and thankful nation with health, plenty, and prosperity. To every considerate person, *the Hand of the Lord* must be visible in all these effects, when not one of them could be produced without his constant action.

2. Our constitutions of body and mind, and the circumstances amidst which we are born, have a great influence on all our following times, as to the prosperity or afflictiveness of them; and these were evidently from the *Hand of God* at first, and depend upon it afterward. Are we formed with geniuses which qualify us to act in the higher stations of life, and to rise to them, and by our birth favourably situated to improve and exert our abilities to the best advantage? The wisdom of God formed us, and appointed our birth from such parents, in such circumstances; and his *Hand* preserves the strength and penetration of mind, or vigour of body, which he gave at first. All the blessings of life which arise from these, it is evident therefore are to be ascribed to his good pleasure, and depend upon it. Or am I formed with a genius, and placed in a rank which qualifies me for the lower offices of life? This is not to be ascribed to chance, but to the direction of the same all-wise and all-good God; and animated by a regard

to him, I must chearfully discharge the duties of this station, being assured, that tho' God has not given me the most pleasing allotment, yet he has given that which his wisdom saw best for me, and for the whole; and I am to receive all the events naturally arising from the genius and station he has assigned me, as from the *Hand* of the same God.

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Is my bodily constitution healthful, and does it qualify me to act with vigour in the duties of life, and with spirit to enjoy its good things? The wisdom of God formed me thus, and the same ever-attentive wisdom guides my blood in its regular course, and thus preserves the life which it gave. The peculiar advantages of this frame are therefore, with all gratitude, to be ascribed to him, and my vigorous health should be chearfully and zealously imployed in his service, and in doing the work which he hath appointed for me. Or has a temperament originally diseased given a large mixture of sickness and pain to my following days? The *Hand of God* is evidently to be seen herein; who united my soul to such a body, and who designed my greatest good in this less agreeable allotment; that I might thus be rendered more dependent on him, more indifferent to sensual pleasure and present good, and more intent on the perfect bliss of immortality,

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than I could easily have been amidst the temptations of health. I should therefore, without murmuring, submit to his will, and chearfully seek those peculiar advantages to which *his Hand* thus points my way.

3. As to that part of the good or evil of life, which more immediately depends on our own conduct, or on the treatment given us by other free agents, we may see and own the *Hand of God* in this also, tho' not in exactly the same manner, as in the preceding instances.

As for those advantages in life, which seem the natural produce of our own wisdom, diligence, piety, temperance, goodness, or integrity; besides observing that the abilities which we exert to so good purposes, were the gifts of God, and that he appointed esteem, friendship, peace, satisfaction, and success, to arise from this course of right acting—When we further consider, how much we owe our acting piously and virtuously to the instructions and favourable influences of the Deity, to his keeping off dangerous temptations, and so disposing our external condition, as might have the most friendly effect on our virtue and piety, we must see great reason to trace these blessings up to the great fountain, from whence *cometh down every good and every perfect gift*; and give the glory

James i.
17.

glory to our heavenly Father, who, by the best discipline, promotes the improvement, perfection, and happiness of his children.

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And though as to those evils which by gross imprudence, negligence or viciousness, we bring on ourselves, we are to impute those to ourselves alone, since we might have avoided them if we would; yet we are humbly to own the wise appointment of God, who to prevent the prevalency of wickedness has ordered, that misery should at present spring out of vice, and that mens *own backslidings might reprove and correct* them, and what they now feel of the bad effects of their sins, might rouse and engage them by repentance to prevent that irreparable ruin, which will attend impenitent transgressors in the next state.

Jerem.
ii. 19.

With regard to others, God has made us necessarily dependent upon them, and he permits them according to their nature to act freely, and if they will wickedly, and us to suffer by their ingratitude, injustice, intemperance, and the like; yet in these cases he often directs and overrules, though he neither impels nor forcibly restrains the wickedness of men.

St. James, with great reason, cautions us, *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; yet*

James i,
13, 14.

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Prov.
xvi. 7.

1 Sam.
xxiii. 25.

in the same place he represents God as trying christians by those afflictions, which a wicked world heaped upon them; and ready upon their prayer to give them liberally that wisdom, which would enable them to perfect their patience, and *enduring to be blessed, receiving the crown of life.* In another place the Scripture assures us, *if a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him; restrains their wrath,* or secretly turns it to the good of the pious and upright. Thus the persecutions of *Saul*, which *David* laments in this *Psalms*, formed him to an habitual trust in God, to fortitude, patience, compassion, and many other virtues, which qualified him to govern better than his predecessor; and God made the invasion of the *Philistines* a means of delivering *David*, when *Saul* had inclosed him, and made sure of his destruction. The idolatrous nations round *Israel* are by the Prophets often represented as *Rods*, by which God corrected his people, when they fell into idolatry and rebellion. The use which God formerly made of those nations with regard to the *Jews*, he now in the course of his wise Providence makes of particular bad men, for exercising and improving the virtues, and correcting the faults of the sincerely, but imperfectly good. We are therefore, in regard to the worst treatment

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we receive from others, not to impute it so intirely to their own viciousness, as to forget the over-ruling direction of God, who permitting us to suffer by their means, thus calls us to consideration wherein we have offended, and to amendment, and to adorn our christian character, by an unshaken integrity, a patient meekness, and a benevolence which like our great Master's *overcomes evil with good.*

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I must not enlarge further on this head, but hasten to the second general.

II. The time of our *Death*, and the circumstances attending it, are peculiarly *in the Hand of God.* The enemies of *David* threatened his life, but he comforts himself with this, that numerous and powerful as they were, yet his life was not at their mercy, but the *Times* of his living or dying were in the *Hand of God.* Under the government of an infinite and ever-present mind, there is no room for blind chance or accident; but as God in every instance knows what is best, and is capable of directing all events, the smallest as well as the greatest, he cannot fail of directing all in the best manner, and to the best ends. If according to the express declaration of the Son of God, *a Sparrow falls not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and by him even the hairs of our head are all numbered;* it is clear, that the removal of a

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reasonable and immortal Being from his state of trial, that his eternal state may be determined, as the most important event relating to him, must be peculiarly under a divine direction. And it is also as certain, that the all-wise goodness of our heavenly Father will direct this event, and the circumstances attending it, with a peculiar regard to the greatest happiness of his grateful and obedient children.

Dan. v.
23.

In the Hand of God is our breath; and to denote the share which the divine Providence has in the death of persons, when a man was killed by accident, it is expressed by *God's delivering him into the hand of his neighbour.* We cannot rationally

Exod.
xxi. 13.

account for our continuance in life one moment, without the *Hand of God*, directing the regular flow of our blood, and upholding our souls in life; and when he pleases he withdraws his hand, and we sink into the dust, *he taketh away our breath, and we die.* By the different constitutions which God originally gives to persons, he assigns to some a longer, to others a shorter term of life; yet not so absolutely, but that according to the wise laws which he hath fixed, intemperance and other vices may destroy a good constitution, and the *wicked not live out half his days.* On the other hand, by the blessing of God on prudence and temperance, a
tender

Pf. civ.
29.

Pf. lv.
23.

tender constitution may be preserved to old age. SERMON
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The life of man is also liable to be assaulted by numberless ministers of death, such as noxious qualities of the air, and the like, which no human foresight can discover, or guard us against them. With regard to these, the Providence which God exerciseth over the good is particularly concerned, either to prevent their influence and preserve life; or to permit their efficacy at such times only, when to die would be their gain. Some pious persons, to whom length of days will prove a real blessing, pass on in the road of life unhurt, and while *thousands fall at their side, and ten thousand on their right hand, the arrows of death come not nigh them.* They live long for the honour of God, and the good of mankind, and their own better preparation for heaven; and when in sensible danger they call upon God, *he delivers and honours them,* and having satisfied them with long life, he then shews them his salvation, from sin and sorrow, and death, in the world of perfection and immortality; while others, equally approved by God, who live to the best purposes, do great good in life, and promise more, are yet cut off in the midst of their days, and of their usefulness; God mercifully removing them, as he did the most pious king

Pf. xci.

7.

Pf. xci.

15, 16.

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2 Chron.
xxxiv,
27, 28.

Pf. xlix.
10.
Ecclef.
vii. 12.
ix. 2.

king *Josiah*, from evils to come, or rewarding their eminent piety with an earlier dismissal from a state of danger, sin, and suffering, and a speedy translation to a world of compleat blessedness and reward; or, perhaps, designing, in this dispensation, other ends of which we, at present, can form no notion.

From meer length or shortness of life, we cannot therefore conclude either the favour or displeasure of God; for as dieth the sinner, so also the good; as dieth the fool, so the wise man, in the prime of life, or in the midst of their days, or in old age. But tho' life and death are dispensed, in appearance, thus promiscuously, and without a constant visible regard to the different characters of persons, and we may not be able distinctly to name the reasons of the divine proceedings; yet it does not from hence follow, that God has none, and does not, in these affairs, act upon the best reasons. On the contrary, it is manifest, that if a *Sparrow falls not to the ground without the notice of our heavenly Father*, much less a dutiful child of God, who is so much better; and if even the *hairs of their head are numbered by God*, much more the days of their lives. This most important change therefore, which closes their state of trial, and determines their rank and character for goodness and happiness

happiness to eternity, cannot take place without the unerring direction of an infinitely wise God, who will certainly direct it with the kindest intentions of their greatest happiness. *Precious*, says the Scripture, *in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his servants.* And among the privileges of good christians, St. Paul reckons that *all is theirs, whether life or death.* With pleasure therefore may they commend *their spirits into his Hand*, who hath redeemed them; with good assurance, that the God, whose love, at so vast an expence as the abasement and death of his own Son, hath opened for them a way to never ending felicity, and by such various methods has qualified them to enjoy it; will continue them here, or call them to the upper world, according as he sees it to be, upon the whole, best for them, and most subservient to the gracious designs of his moral government.

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Pf. cxvi.
15.

1 Cor.
iii. 22.

Pf. xxxi.
5.

We may be apt, in some cases, to impute the deaths of our pious friends to the inadvertently taking a particular step in life, their omitting a proper method of preserving it, and the like; and these things, in regard to what we can do to prolong or shorten life, may be the natural reasons of their death. Yet this being allowed, these cannot in relation to God be the reasons why they are removed out
of

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Revel. i.
18.
Τὸ αὐτὸ
καὶ τὸ
ῥαββί.

Rom.
xiv. 8.

of life, whose wisdom nothing can escape, who can never suffer any to die thro' inadvertency; and who in these cases, if he had not for good reasons determined their removal, would have secretly suggested to their minds the proper methods for preserving life, or turned aside the fatal accident. As therefore we began to live, not by the *will of man*, but by the *will of God*, so we continue to live during his pleasure, and when he pleases, the Redeemer who has *the keys of the grave, and of the invisible state*, opens the door, and summons our spirits into the eternal state. God indeed acts *sovereignly*, and gives us no account of his proceedings; yet this we also are assured of, that he has the best reasons for what he does, and acts with a paternal regard to their happiness who love him. *Whether therefore they live, they live unto the Lord, and whether they die, they die unto the Lord; whether therefore they live or die, they are the Lord's.*

This peculiar regard of God to the pious and good in life, and in death, with its proper effects, constitutes a principal part of what we call a particular Providence; a firm faith in which is one of the best supports of the sincerely good. But from firmly believing this, some persons are hindered by this objection—That it seems most worthy the greatness and wisdom of
God.

God, that he should govern the world by fixed general laws; and they apprehend such frequent interpositions of the Deity, in favour of the pious and good, would be continual violations of the general laws and established order of the divine government. But this objection is founded wholly on a mistake, since a particular Providence, as taught in the Scriptures, may be exerted according to fixed general laws, correspondent to the varying tempers and characters of moral agents.

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The general law, according to which a particular Providence is constantly exercised, is no other than the steady determination of the supreme Wisdom, so to influence human minds for guiding their conduct, and assisting their virtue and piety, as he sees is best fitted to answer his great end in the moral government of the world, the improvement and happiness of his rational creatures; and to do this in a manner consistent with their freedom of choice, and with the general natures and characters which he hath assigned them. In consequence of this original and general determination, in all cases, where persons, by their integrity, their need of a peculiar influence and direction, and their humble application to God for them, are qualified for these favours, it is an invariable rule of the divine government to grant them.

Z

It

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It is a standing law of what we call God's natural Providence, that a person who, when the sun shines, will make the best use he can of his eyes, shall see and avoid a river, or a precipice, while he who will shut his eyes in day-light, and walk with them shut, shall stumble, and fall, and perish. And it is as general and wisely established a law of his moral Providence, that wherever the sincerely pious, after any honest use of their natural powers, and of the advantages granted them, still want his favourable influence on their own minds, or on the minds of others, in order to their attaining what, upon the whole, would be good for them, or avoiding what would be really evil, he will, in all such cases, favourably, tho' secretly, influence human minds for these purposes.

That ideas now rise to the view of the human mind, under the direction of God, conformably to laws established by him; and that our continuing rational creatures, and making improvements in knowledge, depend upon these stated influences of the great Father of Spirits, no one can doubt, who closely reflects on what passes within him; nor can memory be accounted for without them. And why should it be thought any more unworthy of God, as a moral Governor, to influence, according to settled laws, the minds of men,

considered as moral agents, in order to their greatest improvement and happiness?

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Besides the proofs and instances of this particular Providence, before given from Revelation, we may, from Reason, be supplied with this argument for it—That God would not otherwise treat men as being what they really are, changeable creatures, at different times deserving different treatment, frail and ignorant, surrounded with evils and temptations, which they cannot foresee or turn aside, and therefore needing a superior conduct. A wise Governor will treat subjects as being what they are, and to fix and pursue rules irrespective of their conduct, and unsuitable to their cases, is to treat them as being what they are not, and to abide by these, is to act arbitrarily.

If it be urged, that the rational powers and affections which God has given men, the general frame of the world, the advantages of Society, Revelation, and the like, will answer most cases, and that the cases, after all unprovided for, may be adjusted at last; I would answer, that innumerable cases must arise, which, without the exercise of a particular Providence now, seem not capable of being adjusted at last. For instance, if a particular temptation should attack a person sincerely good, in a careless or soft hour, he might be irrecoverably

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ably * intangled in vice, and utterly ruined. An infinite number of such cases must continually occur in the moral world. Will not then the most wise and compassionate Father of mankind see it fit either to turn aside such temptations, or inspirit his children to overcome them, or to recover themselves from a sudden fall? Would it not be treating a sincere lover of goodness otherwise than he deserved, to leave him to be surprized and ruined, and thus to lose all the fruits he would otherwise have enjoyed of his integrity and virtue in the everlasting state? How many instances also might be named, where mere imprudence, in a particular affair, would produce the most lasting bad consequences to persons of real worth and goodness, render them in a manner useless to the world, and deprive them of all the present satisfaction, and future reward of eminent usefulness; and does it not seem worthy of an ever present God, by his secret influence, to prevent this? Especially as it may be done without infringing human liberty, as the will is influenced purely by the understanding thus secretly assisted; and without giving occasion to regard mere enthusiastic impulses, as the general rules of wisdom and virtue are after all to guide us, and

* Mat. vi. 13. xxvi. 41. See Luke xxii. 31.—and 61.

we are only aided to understand, recollect, SERMON
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or apply these.

Let it be also considered, that no case can be mentioned, relating to particular persons, wherein they might pray for some real good, or to be secured against, or delivered from some real evil, wherein God might not effectually answer their prayers, by exciting proper thoughts either in their minds, or in the minds of others; excepting the national blessings or calamities of healthful and fruitful, or sickly and barren seasons; every other good or evil, proper to a state of trial, may, by God's Providence, be thus dispensed, either as an answer to prayer, and reward of virtue, or as a punishment of vice and impiety. Yea, the plague, the greatest temporal calamity, may be inflicted on a Nation, or kept from it, merely by a proper influence on the minds of particular persons.

* Further, it is a fixed constitution of God's moral government, that men should have an influence upon one another for their good or hurt; and why may we not as reasonably admit, what the Scriptures assure us is fact, that the ministry of angels is a part of the scheme of God's moral Providence? God may therefore avert evil, or confer good, as he sees it proper during a state of trial, by the ministry of

* See *Wollaston's Relig. of Nature*, §. 5. n. 18. p. 103, &c.

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angels acting according to settled laws, This would be no more a violation of the general established laws of his Providence, than when good men, in obedience to his commands, exert the powers which he has given them in doing good to others, or preventing evil.

From the allowed perfections then of the supreme Governor, his unbounded wisdom and goodness, and almighty power, we with reason conclude, that he will always act towards mankind, as one ever able and inclined to do whatever, upon the whole, is best; and treat mankind as being what they are, wanting his conduct and favourable influences, and by right, moral, and religious dispositions, and humble prayer, properly qualified to enjoy them. And in this reasoning we are fully confirmed by Revelation, which, in the texts before cited, assure us, that God, in fact, treats us in this manner, and that our *Times are in his Hand*. With a firm faith in this delightful truth, we may then proceed to consider,

II. What instruction, support, and encouragement it is fited to yield us. The time will oblige me to omit many useful reflections, and confine myself to the following.

I. How

1. How wretched and dangerous is the condition of the wicked, who have no interest in the favour of that God, in whose *Hand their Times are.* They can enjoy no good but what comes from God, and yet they are continually offending that great Being, who can in a moment strip them of all, and provoking him to deny them the most necessary or valuable enjoyments, or to curse them in the possession. They can succeed in no design without his leave, and yet can have no reasonable hope that he will bless them, since by their unconcern to please him, and their abuse of his bounties, they are continually calling upon him to blast their most favourite designs. They are constantly exposed to numberless evils, against which their own wisdom and power are no security, and against which they can only be secured by the kind Providence of almighty God; but instead of commending themselves by prayer and well-doing to his protection, by their contempt and disobedience they not only provoke him to withdraw his protection, and leave them open to all those evils, but as their righteous Sovereign to punish their disobedience with more and greater. They are held up only by the frail thread of life from eternal destruction, and yet by their wasting life, neglecting the great end for which they are sent into the world, and

daily rebellions against God, they are adding a weight to break it asunder, and sink themselves in the gulph of perdition.

Forget it as he may, this is the real condition of the most gay, secure, and prosperous sinner, in the height of his enjoyment and prosperity. He cannot depend on a moment of life and happiness, but is exposed to every evil of the present state, and to the yet greater evils of the future; and that he is not as miserable as he deserves, is owing merely to the patience and goodness of the Almighty, which he is continually wearying by his ingratitude and obstinacy. Think of this seriously, ye careless sinners, who are playing on the brink of destruction. Dare not in one instance more to offend the God in whose *Hand your Times are*. Break off your sins by immediate repentance, and seek his favour while yet there is an acceptable time. The whole world cannot recompence you for the hazard you run by one day's longer delay. Before to-morrow the divine displeasure, and death the minister of it, may hide the things of your peace for ever from your eyes.

2. How happy are the sincerely pious and good, whose *Times are in the Hand of God*, their almighty Father and Friend. Full of the confidence which this inspired, *David* concludes the Psalm which he begun

begun in fears and distresses, with this triumphant exclamation, *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence, from the pride of men, and from the strife of tongues. O love the Lord, all ye his saints; for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.* What can we desire more than to have all our affairs in the hand of a most wise and good parent, and in all our wants to have free access to the treasures, and in all dangers to the protection of our almighty and most merciful Father? Amidst the uncertainty of events to be assured, that his unerring wisdom will make all to issue in our greatest good; and amidst all the dangers which threaten this frail life to be assured, that it is safe in the hand of God, who will not suffer us to die, until it be best for us? How happy is their condition, and how serene and contented should their minds be; how chearful and active their concern, by the best discharge of every duty, to *keep themselves in the love of God!*

It is very true, God may, though he loves us, and even because he loves us, deny

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deny us pleasures and conveniencies of which we are fond, if he sees they might prove prejudicial to our best interests, and may kindly prefer our real happiness to the gratifying our inclinations. He may bring upon us afflictions which we would decline; because the physick, though bitter, may be necessary to cure us of worldliness, sensuality, neglect of our duty, or a growing indifference to our eternal interests. And when we most fondly desire life, for the sake of friends whom we dearly love, or for accomplishing designs on which we are set, he may see it best for us to be removed to Paradise. But is not all this real ground for rejoicing, that God, whose wisdom is infallible, and his goodness infinite, will choose for us, not what we fancy to be good, but what he sees to be best? Well therefore may the truly religious and good triumph in the words of St. Paul, *I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height of prosperity, nor depth of adversity, nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Rom.
viii. 38.

3. Are our Times in the Hand of God? This may comfort us under what we might think the untimely deaths of dear and valuable relations and friends. It might give us

us great, though fruitless sorrow, did we think such lives left in the power of chance and accident, or lost merely by inadvertence or mistake, either our own or others. But if our *Times* are really in the *Hand of God*, if what to us appeared chance, was unerringly directed; if human mistakes were wisely over-ruled by him; and no truly pious person can be removed out of life, but when God sees it, upon the whole, to be best for them, and most subservient to the great and good designs of his government; we have then the greatest reason calmly to acquiesce in the determination of God, and though we may not be able to discern the particular ends of the dispensation, yet firmly to believe, that it could not have been better ordered.

This consolation we may, with great justice, apply to ourselves on the present mournful occasion, the removal of our Friend *, in the prime of life, and the bloom of every virtuous and religious disposition.

Her piety was serious, rational, and modest, formed by those honourable and lovely apprehensions of the greatest and best of Beings, which the Gospel of Christ inspires; and cherished by a faithful and

* She was Daughter to the late Rev. Mr. YOUATT, a pious and worthy man, and the former Minister at CUL-
LITON.

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spirited discharge of the various duties of devotion, secret and publick. Her soul was thus raised to an entire love, delight, trust, and resignation to God as her heavenly Father; and her religion approved itself genuine, by establishing in her a likeness to the Father of mercies, in a tender and extensive goodness of heart. And, really, unless our devotion thus animates us to a divine temper, ostentatious discourses of piety, a zealous round of religious duties, and boasts of communion with God, are senseless enthusiasm, or odious hypocrisy.

A natural sweetness of temper, improved by the religion and example of the most meek, benevolent and merciful Jesus, rendered her amiable and exemplary, as a *Daughter*, a *Sister*, a *Friend*, and a *Wife*. And so engaging is the charm of a mild, modest, and generous disposition, that the removal of one eminent for it must be painfully felt by all, who experienced its happy effects; but especially where this amiable disposition, directed by an entire esteem and affection, was peculiarly exerted in making happy a Partner for life.

Her indifference to the show, and wealth, and pleasures of the world, was such as became a christian, whose hopes were full of immortality; and whose firm persuasion it was, that the only important concern

concern of a reasonable and immortal Being, is to acquire those dispositions, and practise those virtues here, which might prepare her to be happy indeed, and for ever, with angels and spirits made perfect, in the presence of God, and of the Lamb, and in the perfection of knowledge, friendship, goodness, and divine love. To her therefore it was easy to be sparing in expences of the showey or pleasurable kind, that she might abound in charity. Such is the character given me of our Friend's prevailing temper, and general course of acting, by those who knew her best.

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No wonder then, that when about to be removed from every thing dear in this world, and entering the unchangeable state, to appear before her supreme Parent and Judge, she could thus express the humble and pious hopes of a christian. " My Time is come; but, blessed be God, my work is finished. Many are my imperfections; but, O Lord, thou knowest I have served thee in sincerity, and walked before thee with an upright heart! My conscience condemns me not, therefore have I confidence towards God; and commit chearfully my Soul to him, whom I have imperfectly loved here, but shall shortly love in perfection."

Who of us, when standing on the borders of the everlasting state, would not prefer such

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such a temper, and such hopes, before a kingdom? They who desire such a death, let them live such a life; for as *we sow, we must reap*; and there is no making so good an end of an useless and irreligious life.

My mourning Friends—The removal of a Person so pious and exemplary, tho' in the prime of life, by that infinitely wise and good God, in whose *Hand all our Times are*, cannot have been directed but with the kindest intention of her greatest happiness. It is the peculiar reward of those, who in the least time dispatch the great work of life, to be the sooner released from labours and difficulties, and called the earlier to receive the crown. Her Friends therefore are humbly to acquiesce in this dispensation, and against their own loss to set her infinitely greater gain.

Her afflicted Partner is to consider, that friendships founded on virtue and religion, are made for immortality; and tho' death may interrupt them for a few moments, will be renewed to infinite advantage in that everlasting state, where they shall meet again, each greatly improved in every amiable and happy disposition, never to be parted more. By experiencing, amidst his present sorrows, the consolations of God, he will be the better qualified to
comfort

comfort others; and by raising his thoughts and affections more to the world of bliss and perfection, and relieving the pains of absence by the pleasures of hope, and thus becoming still more heavenly in his temper and views, he may render this loss, in appearance so great, his present, as well as eternal advantage.

Her Relations and Friends are frequently to recollect her dying advices, to entertain themselves with the memory of her virtues, and the contemplation of her happiness, and thus excite themselves to the nearest imitation. Acting after this manner, they will not only lighten their sorrow, but greatly advance their own improvement and happiness, and render this event, (what the wisdom of our heavenly Father certainly designed it should be) for the best to them, as well as to their late dying, but now immortal Friend.

4. Are our *Times in the Hand of God*? Hence we learn to whom our chief gratitude and praise are due, when we have been preserved in danger, and are restored from sickness. Did the natural goodness of our constitution contribute to our recovery? God at first formed our constitutions so good. Did the skill of the Physician and the efficacy of medicine assist our escape from death, and concur to lengthen our lives? The skill of Physicians, and the efficacy

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2 Chron.
xvi. 12.

Pfal. ciii.
3.

Pfal. cxvi.
8, 9, 17.

efficacy of medicines are entirely from God; and it was his goodness, which placed us so favourably for enjoying those remedies and reliefs. His secret influence often directs the mind of the Physician to a proper remedy, which his blessing makes effectual. As therefore in sickness, with the greatest reason, we *apply to the Lord*, as well as to the *Physician*, so with equal reason when we recover, we should render the most grateful praises to the God *who bringeth down*, and *who raiseth up*. And as he prolongs our time, that we may live for heaven and everlasting blessedness, our gratitude should be warm in proportion to the value of life as connected with eternity; and we should chearfully and heartily resolve to live to God, in whose *Hand our Times are*, *who healeth all our diseases*, and *redeemeth our lives from destruction*. Then whenever God shall see it fit to put an end to our time here, his goodness will cause us to begin a state of life, perfection and felicity which will endure for ever. Thus the piety of *David* exprest itself, who gratefully confessing, *thou hast delivered my soul from death, and mine eyes from tears*, adds, *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living*. O Lord, truly I am thy servant! I will offer unto thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the Name of the Lord.

5. Are *our Times*, are all the good or evil events of our lives, and the time of our dying intirely in *the Hand of God*? SERMON
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Let this persuade all, especially the young, immediately to secure the favour of this great God, and to put themselves under his conduct and blessing. You are perhaps seting out on the ocean of life, and see round you the wrecks of many which fill you with fear and concern. You may have lost, when you most wanted them, the counsel and assistance of prudent and tender parents and friends, by whose advice and friendship you might have hoped to steer better over this sea. Many you know lie in wait to deceive and ruin you, even under the disguise of friends. And you must expect storms of trouble and affliction as well as others. How shall your youth and inexperience proceed safely through all these dangers, and not only get well through life, but arrive at the port of everlasting rest and felicity?

My friends, there is one method, and but one, to secure for yourselves a safe passage, and a prosperous issue. Like our late worthy Friend, choose God for the guide of your youth, take his word for your invariable rule of acting, daily and earnestly implore his assistance and conduct, chearfully and intirely devote yourselves to him in the christian covenant, and

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resolutely avoid all bad company, with whatever would tempt you to break his commands, and forfeit his favour, and you shall then be happy in it. *David* introduces this pleasing consideration that *his Times were in the Hand of God*, with declaring his choice of *Jehovah* for his God. *I said, thou art my God; my Times &c.* Your Times are in *his Hand*, yea, all nature is there. The winds and the waves obey his voice; good men can do no more for you than he allows or enables them to do, and they shall be every thing to you that he would have them; evil men can do no more than he permits, and he will permit them to do no more than shall be for your greater good.

Following the light of his word you will proceed with honour, satisfaction, and safety, thro' life, supplied by his bounty you shall want no good thing; while from a sense of his favour, the consciousness of well doing, the pleasures of devotion, and the hopes of immortality, you shall derive nobler pleasures than the world can give, and such as it can never take away. And although your constitutions may be so tender, and your lives so frail, that you cannot promise yourselves a year of life, you will be assured of living as long as shall be best for you. And he who hath placed you here in order to your being trained for

heaven and eternal blessedness, and in whose hand is the time of your death, will not remove you till he hath prepared you for a better world; and will then receive you to that state, where times of changes, uncertainties, and afflictions for ever end, and where eternity begins, a state of unmixed, unchangeable, and everlasting blessedness. SERMON
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God grant we may so consider these important truths, and the event which occasions our discoursing on them, that we may immediately and with all our heart strive to ingage this God to be the guide of our lives, and our portion for ever. *Amen.*



T O

Mrs. HALLIDAY.

MADAM,

YOU will be pleased favourably to accept this Discourse, preached and printed at your request; and allow it to moderate your sorrows for the loss of a Gentleman so justly dear to you.

We are all too prone, especially while divine Providence smiles upon us, to forget the nature of the present life, appointed to be a scene of trial and preparation for immortality; and to indulge expectations of continued tranquility and enjoyment, which can only be answered in the next, the everlasting state. And the disappointment of our hopes, when some great affliction overtakes us, makes the stroke to wound us much the deeper. Whereas, constantly to consider our best loved comforts as frail and uncertain, and our life as not designed to be a scene of ease, but of labour, and preparation for a world of unmingled and eternal blessedness; and in consequence of this,

this, to derive our principal satisfactions from approving ourselves unto God, and from a good hope of his favour, from discharging well the duties of our various relations, and doing good abundantly; from frequent meditations on the heavenly felicity, and lively hopes of possessing it—These sentiments, and this conduct, give a strength to the mind for supporting afflictions, and enable us to regard them as light, and but for a moment; and by the joys of faith and hope, to supply the loss of the dearest external blessings.

Suffer then, Madam, this representation of human life, as frail and uncertain, to abate your grief for having experienced it to be such, in a most tender instance. And may the God of all consolation, who delights to stile himself the God of the widow and fatherless, raise your mind to so chearful a trust in his Providence, and resignation to his all-wise and most merciful dispensations; and to such invivifying prospects of that blissful world, where after a few days of separation we shall rejoin our pious friends, triumphing in perfection and felicity everlasting; as will render the present loss a means of your enjoying divine satisfactions, and of working for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

A a 3 . . . May

DEDICATION.

May this representation also, of the vanity and shortness of human life, joined with this affecting instance, guard your numerous and promising offspring, against indulging large expectations from an uncertain world; and determine them to fix their views of happiness on an eternal heaven; and may the loss of an earthly Parent increase their concern, to secure their welfare in a world of changes, by insuring the favour of their heavenly. That their finished virtue, and established piety, may be your full consolation; may supply to the world and the church, the removal of their worthy Father, and of their other pious relations, as God shall call them up to a better state, and prepare them for a joyful meeting in that world, where sorrow and death will be known no more; where the spirits of the just are made perfect, and the saints are like the angels, and where the patience, resignation, and fidelity of a few days will be rewarded with an immortality of blessedness, perfect and divine.

These, Madam, are the earnest prayers of

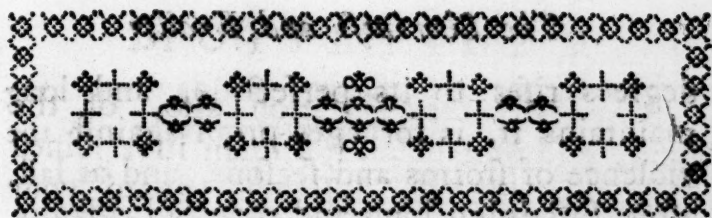
Your obliged and most

obedient Servant,

THOMAS AMORY.

Taunton, July 27, 1754.

S E R-



S E R M O N X V I.

The Shortness and Frailty of Human
Life.



J O B xiv. 2.

*He cometh forth like a Flower, and is cut
down*.*

 F we look back to the preced- SERMON
XVI.
ing verse, or to the much lament-
ed death which occasions this
discourse, we shall soon know
whose picture is here drawn, and the near
resemblance it bears with the original.
'Tis the life of Man that *Job* here repre-
sents; not by an Oak, which by flow

* JOHN HALLIDAY, Esq; died *June* 9th 1754, in his
44th year.

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degrees rises to its perfection, and long maintains it, is for ages proof against the violence of storms and seasons, and at last, after sustaining long and repeated assaults, suddenly submits, and slowly sinks to the ground—but by a Flower, which a few days bring to perfection, which preserved with the tenderest care, and permitted to live to its utmost date, can continue but a short season, and hold its bloom and beauty a yet shorter; and which is usually not allowed to stand out its short season, but being liable to be crushed by every accident, falls untimely, and even its beauty and fragrance, instead of protecting it, invite the destroyer. *Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a Flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a Shadow, and continueth not.*

Job designed to give vent to his sorrows in this description, and by representing the frailty, vanity, and wretchedness of mortal man, and of himself in particular, to move the divine pity; that the calamities under which he suffered might be removed, and his life, vain and short at best, be restored, and pass as easily as it could. For he adds immediately, *do'st thou open thine eyes upon such a one?* that is, to mark him strictly, and punish his faults; *turn from him that he may rest, and accomplish as an hireling his*

his day. I shall consider the words with a more general view; and, SERMON
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I. Give you the distinct import of the expression, *he cometh forth like a flower and is cut down.*

II. Mention some considerations which will help us to judge aright of this representation of human life, and vindicate the divine perfections and providence in thus appointing it.

III. Make a few practical reflections.

I. I would distinctly explain the similitude here used, and show you in what respects the life of man resembles a flower. Without straining the similitude, the following particulars offer themselves, were probably designed by *Job*, and are abundantly verified by scripture, and daily experience. The short continuance of human life, and the much shorter of its bloom; the feebleness of our state; the many changes to which we are by this exposed; and the frequency of our falling even amidst our bloom; without hope of being restored when we are once brought down; *he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down.*

1. The life of man resembles a flower in its short continuance at longest, and in the still shorter duration of its bloom and vigor. The following words prove this to have been designed by *Job*, *he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.* And this was evidently designed by *St. Peter*, in the

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1 Pet. i.
24, 25.

the beautiful contrast he forms between this short duration of human life, and the long duration of the word of God, and its beneficial effects on the human mind. *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man, more transitory still, as the flower of the grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you.* In the xth Psalm, the divine eternity is set in a strong light, being opposed to the life of man, appearing under this similitude. *Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. But thou turnest man to destruction.—In the morning they are like the grass which groweth up. In the morning, thou allowest it no longer time, it groweth up and flourisheth; in the evening it is cut down and withereth.*

I will not attempt farther to illustrate the brevity of human life and glory, by comparing them with the *everlasting mountains*, and their long-liv'd offspring the *cedars*, or with some animals to whom nature has allowed a longer duration. Because in this way, 'tis but to shift the comparison to insects of a day, and we are as antediluvian patriarchs, whose long lives swallow up numberless generations of the other. Nor shall I, which would be a more natural comparison, set our short life against the

the duration of our elder brethren, the angels, opposed to which it dwindles to a point. I will rather, since it may be more instructive, consider the shortness of our life with a view to the capacities we possess, and the improvements for which we seem to be made, and would life permit it, might attain; and the short duration of our happiness, when compared with the hard and long labours preparatory to enjoyment.

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There is a rational spirit in man, *God hath taught him more than the beasts of the field; and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding;* capacities for an endless proficiency in knowledge and goodness. He can make the past and future his own; form designs for the longest succession of ages; and he hath large and strong desires after happiness, which urge him to pursue one object after another, and will not suffer him to rest after a thousand experiments. His progress in knowledge and virtue is very gradual, he is quick to commit errors, and slow to correct them. Religion and virtue, which constitute his greatest happiness, must be made habitual before they can give him full and lasting pleasure; and habits of these are not acquired without smart struggles with opposing inclinations, and good actions frequently and long repeated. Such is the nature

Job xxxv.
11. xxxii.
8.

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nature of man ; and were we to consider this life as his all, and by this to measure his duration here, must we not think a thousand years a scanty allotment, for ranging the boundless fields of science, and for climbing exalted heights of virtue and piety, and then enjoying as a reward the pleasure of the elevation ; for satisfying such large desires, and executing such great and generous projects as he can form ?

And what in fact is his term ? Seventy years ordinarily measure the longest. Of these sleep, and the actions immediately necessary for the support of life, consume almost half ; and with the generality the labours required to furnish provisions for the animal part, the greater share of the remainder. How much of life is gone e're reason dawns ; how much more e're it arrives at a degree of strength and brightness, sufficient to dissipate the clouds raised by our prejudices and passions ! Sense being some years older than reason, takes the advantage of its absence, and so deeply roots it's follies and mistakes, that it proves a long work for reason, even in its strength, to pull them up ; while at the same time they prevent it from growing strong ; and yet they must be removed, before those seeds from which true knowledge and happiness spring can flourish. How

much

much more of life passes away, before our active powers arrive at their maturity; after this we are a while hindered from action and enjoyment, and more of our span must be allowed, for gaining the experience and prudence necessary to guide and employ them aright! Half of our proper life is gone, before we are thoroughly qualified to manage it, and to enjoy its pleasures. Of this short term, how much less can we command, for the peculiar actions, pursuits and enjoyments, of reasonable beings, for the satisfactions of knowledge, virtue, friendship, and devotion. How little a while do we continue in maturity, how soon tend to decay! Our knowledge, prudence, and experience increase; but our vigor and ability for action and enjoyment lessen; till after a few years, we become unable to execute the good designs we projected; and our * wisdom, destitute of the spirit and resolution of youth, sinks into slowness and a cautious cowardice, and by degrees into peevishness and censoriousness. At best, we grow sensible of the errors of our conduct, when we have no more opportunities for acting better; and are fully convinced of our true interests, when we can no longer pursue them. And then declaring to those who

* *Multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, &c.*

Horat. de Arte Poet.

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are younger, and who seldom believe us, that the world is vain, we are ourselves instances of it, by sinking into the grave in the midst of our wisdom.

Is not this too like a picture of human life, when spent as we reckon very well? * *Theophrastus*, an eminent philosopher, and as appears by his *Characters*, a nice judge of human nature, dying at the end of 107 years, a very long life, according to the present measure, complained of nature for granting to stags and crows a term much longer, which he thought useless to them; when had it been indulged to man, he might have attained a high perfection of knowledge; and he regreted, that he must leave life when he just began to be wise. To persons engaged in the pursuits of sensual pleasures, riches, or grandeur, how short is life! A great part of it being employed in preparations for gaining their several objects, and in pursuing them; and, perhaps, ere they acquire or enjoy them in a degree that will recompence their labours, life is over. Or they have at last some gratifications in their reach, which they want vigor to enjoy.

And even where persons soonest enter upon sensual enjoyments, how few and how short are the moments of actual pleasure, if compared with the days spent in

* Cicer. Tusc. Quæst. L. iii.

the pursuit, or with the intervals of satiety and disgust which intervene, before their appetites can recover strength, and they again relish their objects. Others become rich, when they have neither time nor abilities remaining to enjoy wealth, and hoard it for others to whom they envy it. Or they rise to power and distinction, by the time they are brought to think popular applause noisy breath, great state a great incumbrance, and to despise themselves for having sacrificed their repose, enjoyment, and purity of their minds, to things so worthless. Ask any at the close of life, I mean of those whose views and hopes terminate in death, and they will frankly confess the shortness and vanity of life, and feelingly complain, how few the moments of true life and enjoyment have been, and that they die before they well know that they have lived. In their hands life has proved like a flower, which they have no sooner gathered, and begun to delight themselves with it's bloom and fragrance, but it fades and dies.

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XVI.Luke
xii. 16.

Should not this, my friends, convince us, that a wise God, our maker, who hath given us capacities and desires so disproportionate to our present state, and placed us in circumstances so unfavourable to our becoming happy, were this the whole of our existence; but which are so well suited

to

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Psalms
lxxxix.
47.

Pf. ciii.
15.

to a first state, a state of improvement and preparation for a nobler and more lasting life; that he must have certainly designed us for this other and better state? For on this supposition alone, can man, his principal work here below, appear a masterpiece of wisdom and goodness. And should not this also determine us, constantly to regard the present life in its relation to a future, and to improve it in that manner, which shall have the best influence on our perfection and felicity in a following, more durable and exalted state? Since as certain as it is, that an all-wise God has not *made all men in vain*, so certain it is, that he hath made us for immortality.

2. As human life resembles a flower in flourishing and continuing but a short space, so in the frailty of its state. This the royal poet designed to teach us by the similitude. *As for man, his days are as the grass, as the flower of the field so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone.* What more tender than the beauty and life of a flower? A hot sunshine, a chilling or scorching wind, put a period to both; and the most contemptible animal or insect have it at their mercy. How very like in this respect is human life to a flower!

How

How delicate the frame of the human body! A variety of fine springs compose the machine, each of them liable to be disordered by a thousand accidents; and the disorder of a single one proves fatal to the ease or life of the man. A slight change in the air greatly affects our frame, and if it cannot destroy our action, spoils the sprightliness and pleasure of it. And how often does it convey into our lungs a subtle poison, too fine to be seen or avoided; the malignant influence of which, in a few days, converts beauty to deformity, ease to pain, reason to madness, and life into death! How many the accidents without us, and the disorders from within to which we are subject! They are too many to be numbered, and each of them an overmatch for our life or ease. So that in the midst of life we are in death, and *crushed before the moth*. The food which we take to support life, often proves the seed of diseases and death; and those exercises which we use for the continuance or pleasure of it, through our not duly proportioning or circumstancing them, hasten the ruin of both. Thus sunshine and rain, both necessary to the life and beauty of a flower, in a small excess wither or bend it to the earth.

Job. iv.
19.

How nice is the texture of the brain, on which the full exertion of our reason

B b

depends,

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depends, and how easily disordered! What a small matter will cause an obstruction in a vein or artery, and put an end to life! What slight accidents cloud the eye or stop the ear, the two great inlets of knowledge and pleasure from without! And how easily are tumultuous passions excited, which while they last, destroy the peace and enjoyment, and often the health and life of man! How frail also is our moral constitution, how changeable our purposes for virtue and religion; and how ready are we to do those actions, one day, we shall repent the next; and how prone to drop those, on which, from a full conviction of their necessity to our happiness, we had determined!

And then, a man's own frailty is not the only cause which renders his happiness so very precarious. He depends also upon others, frail as himself, whose frame is as brittle, their virtue as unsettled, and whose passions are as mutinous as his own. Such are the visible foundations on which rest the life and happiness of man; who yet many times in his prosperity so far forgets himself, that he pronounces his state firm as a mountain, and says *I shall never be moved*. This is the language of his heart for a few days; till his own folly, vice or sickness, the sickness or death, the caprice, inconstancy, unkindness, treachery,
or

Pf. lv.
22.

or viciousness of a Wife, a Child, or a Friend, force him to change his language, and with a melancholy solemnity to cry out, *Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; surely every man in his best estate is altogether vanity.*

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If. ii. 22.
Pf.
xxxix. 5.

3. Human life resembles a flower in this also, that it is not only frail, but often cut down or crushed in its prime; nor are its short standing beauty or fragrance any security. The mower enters the field, and the fair and fragrant flower, the mature and useful plant, the withered stalk, and the useless or baneful weed, fall at once in an undistinguishing ruin. With a view to the sudden fading of human life in the height of it's glory, St. James compares it to a flower. *As the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it passeth away.* And the sudden ruin which overtook Job in the midst of his prosperity, with the untimely death of all his Children, were evidently intended, when he compared human life to a flower which grew up and was cut down.

James i.
10.

* A Youth is just grown up to exert his rational and moral powers, sprightly

* Master Isaac Tr. Welman, who died of the small-pox, March 19, 1754, in his fifteenth year.

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innocence, modesty, sweetness, and beauty disclose and delight his acquaintance. Parents begin to think themselves recompenced for all the cares, expences, and labours of education, and with pleasure observe the flourishing shoots of early piety and virtue; the bud displays beauty and sheds perfume; which, alas, are no security. *For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone.* A subtle poison floating in the air, enters with the vital breath, and corrupts the blood; and what a change succeeds! A flower cut down and trampled on is not more altered. They who just before saw him with rapture, cannot now bear the sight; the late lovely form is consigned to the dark covering of the grave, where with it the hopes and joys of Friends and Parents lie buried.

Or as in the fresh and affecting instance now before us. A person has advanced farther in life, by knowledge, experience, and integrity, is qualified to act an honourable and useful part in society, and for years discharges it. In his family is a faithful and affectionate Husband, a prudent and tender Parent. His acquaintance experience him a warm, able, and active Friend, and the cause of religion and liberty find in him a steady support. Having for a considerable time filled with dignity one post of great usefulness, the voice of his

his country calls him to a higher, to serve its interest in Parliament; and the expectations of his friends rise with his advancement, only to be the more disappointed by his death. The joy and triumph of his new dignity are soon succeeded by the sad solemnities of his funeral, the tears of friends, and by the tender and distressing sorrows of a Widow, and a numerous Offspring; deprived of a Father when they most need his prudence and affection.

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Are such cases as these uncommon? Or rather, do we not often see instances of persons, who have improved, in the best manner, their natural abilities, and the advantages of a good education, acquired talents for being signally useful, been influenced by the noblest views, and zealous for the most useful designs, yet cut down in all their glory; their treasures of knowledge and virtue lost to the world, and themselves removed many times to make room for persons of very different characters; who succeeding to their power, riches, and influence, have made them the instruments of as great evil to the world, as the other promised good? Does not History furnish numerous examples of this kind, persons of the highest characters, and the most extensive sway? The pious king *Josiah*, was he not removed in his prime, though he seemed formed to stem

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the torrent of a most corrupt age, and to support the interests of true religion, against the most violent opposition?

And to come nearer home. What blessings did all good men, not only in *England*, but throughout the protestant world, promise to themselves from the eminent virtues of King *Edward VI*? How much did he perform in the little time that he lived, how much more did he give reason to expect? Yet in his earliest bloom was he removed; and by whom succeeded? Lady *Jane Gray* was another instance nearly joined to the former. What a character had Prince *Henry*, eldest son to *James* the first, for solid virtue and merit, and a generous love to mankind; how unlike his Father and his successor? What wars and miseries did the stiff arbitrary humour of his successor occasion; which, probably, would have been prevented by the longer life of the other? Shall I name also the immature death of the late Queen *Mary* of blessed memory, for which a nation were sincere mourners? Need I add more instances, or are you not fully convinced, that in this respect also, *Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down*?

4. The last instance I shall mention wherein the life of man resembles a flower, is this, that their fates are irreparable; when once blasted and cut down, they re-
turn

turn to life and beauty no more in this world. A tree, though shaken by wintry blasts, and spoiled of all its leaves and verdure, yet hath it's beauties restored by the returning spring; but man dieth, and we see no second spring indulged to him. *Job* appears to have had this in view by what follows. *There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will shoot again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. But man lieth down, and riseth not up, till the heavens be no more.* And the same truth is taught in a *Psalms* before cited, *The wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.* I cannot help adding the reviving assurance that follows, *but the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting, and his righteousness, or goodness, unto childrens children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those who remember his commandments to do them.* Is it necessary to enlarge in proof of this observation, or to put you in mind, that the most earnest and continued prayers and tears cannot recal the departed spirit, to reanimate the forsaken body; and that an excess of grief for the departed may indeed hasten us after them, but can never prevail that they should again become as we are? Of the many thousand millions whom death has cut down, how few have been restored to life! A few persons were

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John v.
28.
2 Pet.
iii. 10.

indeed rescued from the grave, when the LORD of life conversed upon earth, to confirm his promise, and give the world an earnest of a general resurrection. But we must expect such events no more, till this earth reach it's last period, and our LORD return to *call forth all that are in their graves, until our heavens are no more.*

Let us now proceed,

II. To take a view of some considerations, which will help us to judge aright of this representation of human life; and vindicate the divine perfections and providence in appointing that thus it should be. I have time to take notice only of the few following.

Gen. ii.
and iii.
Rom. v.
12.—viii.
20.

1. This state of vanity, frailty, and imperfection, was not the original state of man, but introduced by disobedience to his Creator. The scripture account of the original state of man is this. Our first parents were formed for a longer life, placed in a paradise of delights, secured against all injurious accidents, and had it in their power to attain their full perfection. If they continued obedient, they were privileged from dying, and would, probably, when they had been tried here for a proper time, have been translated to heaven without tasting death. These great advantages and blessings they received from the goodness of their Maker, and could have transmitted

mitted to their posterity. But they rebelled against God, and by eating the forbidden fruit, poisoned their constitutions, introduced disorders and mortality into the human frame, and *subjected the creature to vanity*. And who can expect a perfect constitution should arise out of a violation of the divine appointment, to derive an immortal nature from mortal parents, or to inherit compleat happiness from traitors? Or who reasonably complain, that a life full of temptations, labours, and sufferings, is short?

Job seems to have had a regard to this forfeiture of life and happiness by the Parents of mankind, in that expression which introduces the text, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble; since Eve being deceived was first in the transgression.*

1 Tim.
ii. 14.

If it be asked, how was it consistent with the wisdom, holiness, and goodness of God, to permit such consequences from our first Parents sin to their offspring, *who had not sinned after the similitude of their transgression?* I answer, God is an absolute master of his undeserved benefits. We could with no reason claim of him as our right, compleat blessedness and immortality upon earth. It was certainly great goodness in him to put it into the power of the first pair, to convey the advantages
for

Rom. v.
14.

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for so fair a possession to their Children. And if our present enjoyments are greater than our sufferings, our good than our evil, and life, upon the whole, be rather eligible than death, this is all, that supposing we continued innocent, we could claim from the justice of God. *And shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive evil; especially when we also have done evil, and most of the miseries of the present state are the effects of our follies and vices?*

Job ii.
10.

But it may still be urged, if we could not demand more from strict justice, yet might we not with reason expect from the boundless wisdom and goodness of our Maker, that our undeserved disadvantages and sufferings should be some way compensated? Yes, we might; and God has abundantly answered and exceeded our just expectations. For,

2. The present life of man has an advantageous connection with another, an immortal life. May we not suppose, that *Job* designed this, when he compared the life of man to a hireling, who after his day of labour, is to receive his reward? Especially if we add his remarkable declaration, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day on the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall I see God.*

Job. xix.
25, and
Sherlock's
discourse
on the
sense of
the An-
tients.

God. Our all-wise Creator designed by the shortness and vanity of the present state, to lead us to the belief and pursuit of a state more durable and perfect; and hath so ordered things, that the necessary imperfections and difficulties of the present, should prepare us for the compleat blessedness of a future. The connection of this life with another, and its influence upon it, when well understood, remove all just complaints of it's shortness, frailty, disappointments, and ruin.

It's shortness will be more fully considered under the next observation; yet I cannot help asking here, whether a reasonable man would complain, that a time of trial and danger was too short, which was yet long enough for him to gain the victory and the reward? Who can with reason complain of the weakness introduced into our nature by the fall, and of the difficulties which attend the attainment of our true happiness in knowledge, virtue, and piety, and the imperfection of these at present, who considers, that proportionate assistances or allowances will be granted by God; that a sincere endeavour after perfection and gradual progress toward it, is all that God requires of us, in order to our rising to perfection in a future state; and that the glories of our crown, and degrees of our blessedness, will be determined by the

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the difficulties we have surmounted, by our activity, and fidelity? That by the imperfect, though laborious obedience of a short life, we may be intitled to a reward, of equal, if not superior value to that, which had not *Adam* fallen, would have been granted to the perfect obedience of a long state of trial? Who that has a just value for the future blessedness, for the perfection of goodness and devotion, for immortality, and the compleat fruition of the supreme good, can complain, that this world, his most dangerous enemy, which would divert him from seeking the other, has so few charms, so little that can ingage a reasonable man, and tempt him to forfeit heaven? And who that has a proper relish and esteem for the satisfactions, which a fixed contemplation and good hope of immortal blessedness yields, can complain, that God has sown so thick vanity, disappointment, and vexation, in other pursuits, as in a manner to force men to turn their views and hopes to immortality, and anticipate it's blessedness?

'Tis clear then, that we have no room to complain of God for permitting the consequences of the fall, which are so happily over-ruled or remedied. *As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.* All are through his obedience restored to a capacity for immortal blessedness, shall be actually

1 Cor.
xv. 22.

actually raised, and if they have yielded an obedience proportionate to their abilities and advantages, be raised to eternal life and blessedness.

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3. Human life, short as it is, proves ordinarily long enough for all the purposes of virtue and piety, and everlasting happiness?

As to the case of Children, who die before they have attained the use of reason, God has wisely left us in a great measure ignorant. Yet of this in general we are sure, that they are in the hand of an infinitely good Parent, *who hateth nothing that he hath made*; and who hath made nothing in vain; and who will not suffer their noble capacities for a divine and immortal blessedness to be lost, without their fault. And with regard to their Parents, if they are sincerely pious, they are interested in the promise, that *all things shall work together for good to them who love God*. And this general assurance is sufficient to remove the grief occasioned by losing Children, before they had an opportunity of discovering those good qualities, which would ingage a rational and more lasting affection to them, and occasion deeper regret for their death.

Rom.
viii. 28.

As for Children whose opening reason has rendered them capable of religion and virtue, and who have well improved this
early

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early season, yet have fallen like flowers in their bloom, it should be remembered, that their minds, not prepossessed by vicious passions and habits, more easily acquire, and in less time, habits of virtue and piety, than theirs who engaged later in the work, and suffered vice to take the first possession. The youngest persons, who have attained the exercise of reason, may know God and Christ, and reverence and love them answerably to their knowledge; may enough apprehend the goodness and perfection of God, and their obligations to him, to determine them to prefer his favour above every other thing; to make it their chief care to please him, especially by imitating his kindness, mercy, and truth; and to avoid whatever would offend him. They may daily cultivate and express this temper by humble prayer, and grateful praise; may fill well their small sphere, and make preparations for filling a larger. And if this has been the employment of their lives, death which shortens their work, will not take away, but hasten their reward.

Mark x.
13.

Christ has said, *Suffer little Children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.* And when brought to him, he *embraced and blessed them.* Their uncorrupted innocence, simplicity, and sweetness, their freedom from
lust,

lust, ambition, avarice, envy, and the like corrupt dispositions, and their love to God and Christ, their affection and gratitude to their Parents, and other Friends, suited to their knowledge and understanding, qualify them for the kingdom, as they are a good part of the temper of heaven, and in the celestial paradise will soon grow up to a perfect character. May we not also justly reason, that the generous master who rewarded those who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, because they had not been called and hired before, and wrought one hour, will not exclude those from his bountiful rewards, who entered the first hour, and wrought during that, and would have continued to labour for him, if he himself had not discharged them? And for the consolation of their Parents, we can observe, that although their children lived not long enough to repay them for the cares and labours of a good education, by their finished piety, their duty to them, and usefulness to the world, yet as during their short stay, their Children give them opportunity for exerting the proper virtues of Parents, and by their death of manifesting a pious resignation, they may be assured, that the God who did not allow them to enjoy the satisfactions of a finished work, will yet reward their fidelity as far as they proceeded

Matt.
xx. 6.

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in it; when he himself takes the work out of their hand, and obliges the earthly Parent to surrender his charge to the heavenly, to the great Father of Spirits.

As for the case of those who die in youth, and who have not improved it, it is certainly a just, and may be a most wise and merciful dispensation, when God removes them; preventing their longer abuse of his goodness, and their greater misery. And the early summons of such to their account, all unprepared as they are, is, as will be shown presently, of great service to the world; exciting surviving Parents and Children to a speedy, zealous, and active improvement of their time, and discharge of those duties on which their present and final happiness depend.

If then, the present life be ordinarily long enough, for all who are sincerely willing to perform it, to acquire a pious and good disposition, and secure the blessedness of heaven, the ground of complaints for want of time to perfect our knowledge and goodness, and enjoy the satisfactions of perfection, for a space proportioned to the difficulty of obtaining it, are removed. Our noble capacities are not given us in vain, though they cannot be filled in the present state; when by furnishing them as far as we can with their proper good here, we not only secure their full satisfaction,

tion, but their enlargement also hereafter. When I have by close study and repeated labours qualified myself for extensive usefulness; and begun to taste the satisfactions of imitating the divine benevolence, and serving the best interests of mankind, death may remove me from my station, but cannot render my labour in vain. It may remove me from temptations and difficulties, which might have discouraged me and endangered my future happiness; and it certainly removes me to the possession of a blessedness, that will give me no room to regret any labours by which I attained it. And though my benevolence was not gratified here, in my promoting the happiness of mankind, this generous affection will be abundantly satisfied in the society of spirits divinely blessed, and with whom I may mutually receive and give improvements in knowledge, goodness, devotion and felicity for ever.

4. This frail life of ours is constantly guarded by a watchful Providence. *God upholds our souls in life;* and with unerring wisdom and paternal goodness determines the time of our abode here; and all the good are assured of living as long, as to these perfections appears best for them, and for the world. God has not indeed by an absolute unconditional decree fixed the period of every man's days, This would

Psalms
lxvi. 9.
Matt.
vi. 25.

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Matt. x.
29.

superfede all endeavours and cares of ours to preserve or lengthen life, would excuse from all guilt those who in appearance wilfully shortened their days, and make vain the promises of long life to obedience, and the threatenings of death to the disobedience of some commands. It is never the less certain, that as we come not into the world by chance, but under the direction of a most wise and good God, so we are not removed without his special direction. If as our Saviour reasons, *a sparrow falls not to the ground without our heavenly Father*, much less *a man*; least of all a good man. Even *the hairs of his head are all numbered*. What a strong expression is this of God's vigilance and concern for the lives and interests of his servants, and what a security to them? The most healthful constitution, the best physicians, the most salutary air, and thousands of the bravest guards, or the better guard an obliged and affectionate people, cannot half so well secure a prince from death, as this promise, and the providence of God secures every good man, till it is best for him to die; and who would desire a longer date?

I would farther refer you to the xcist *Psalm*, it is too long to be quoted intire, and it would be an injury to leave out any part. "Am I then frail, open to numerous evils, and the sudden stroke of death;

“ death ; and is my constitution weak ?
 “ I will yet triumph in the divine pro-
 “ mises, and the divine protection. I will
 “ throw aside all anxiety for the future,
 “ and be solely concerned to improve aright
 “ the present, and establish my title to the
 “ divine favour and guardianship. My
 “ life is in the hand of God, and there
 “ I would have it. I rejoice that I shall
 “ continue in life, or remove hence, not
 “ according to my own erring choice, but
 “ the unerring appointment of God.”

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To confirm our faith in the divine disposal of our lives, and increase our chearful resignation to it, we may in many instances discover the wisdom and goodness of God even in shortening the lives of valuable persons. The scripture has informed us in the case of that excellent king *Josias*, that *he was taken from the evil to come*. May we not in all cases see enough to alleviate our sorrow, and to justify us in believing, that God in this dispensation acted upon the best reasons, though we do not perceive them ? And is it strange that we who can see but darkly the future, and but a few steps before us, should not be able distinctly to discern the wisdom of the divine conduct, to whom all the past, and future, as well as the present lie open ? Is it any more than reasonable, to resign ourselves with an implicit faith to his disposal ; nay,

2 Chron.
xxxiv.
28. Isai.
lvii. 1.

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is it not our happiness, and pleasingly to acquiesce, when he has assured us, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love him?*

5. The absolute uncertainty of life, and the cutting down frequently the fairest and most promising flowers is a wise appointment, as it excites all to the immediate best improvement of their time, and takes away all reasonable ground of delays. Though religion and virtue be the true happiness of man, and a constant veneration, and prevailing love of the best and greatest of beings, a steady dependance upon him, devotedness to his will, apprehension of his presence and favour, grateful resentments of his past benefits, an active concern to please him, and fervent aspirations after his immediate presence and perfect love; though this temper and the actions which express and improve it, constitute the truest felicity of man in the present state; though to love our neighbours as ourselves, to be employed in doing good, and to be temperate in all things, are dispositions which every one who wisely loves himself will cultivate with constant care; yet such is the power of sensual objects, especially with Youth, so refined are the satisfactions of religion, and such to the generality the difficulties attending the entrance on a life of piety; such is the influence of bad examples,

amples, inconsideration, passion, and the like, that numbers who are truly pious and good, would probably have deferred their application to religion, still expecting a more convenient season, and thus have let pass the best season, and lost many degrees of future blessedness; had not the near view of death, which the shortness of life gives, added a mighty force to all the motives of religion, and as much weakened the temptations to vice; and had not the numerous instances of persons dying young convinced them, that there was no depending on the future, but if they would not madly hazard eternal blessedness, they must improve the present season.

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Since then our being early pious and good, is of so great importance to our happiness, and to the general good, and the ill consequences of an opposite choice are so many and fatal——particularly indulgence to vicious inclinations, till we have lost the power to govern them; the slavery of reason and tyranny of the passions; it is worthy the wisdom and goodness of God to guard against such effects, though at the expence of removing many who were likely to become eminently good, as well as cutting down those in their prime, who were likely to have been fruitful in vice.

Since thus every considerate observer must reason——“If early and distinguish-

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“ ed virtue and piety, and such fair hopes
 “ of future usefulness, could not insure the
 “ continuance of life, certainly I cannot
 “ reasonably depend upon it; especially if
 “ instead of improving my prime of life,
 “ I am wasting it in folly and vice. And
 “ what reason have I to fear, least a righte-
 “ ous God should order me to be cut
 “ down; and since I will not do good in
 “ life, make my death instructive and a
 “ warning; and exclude me from a heaven
 “ of compleat and everlasting blessedness;
 “ the value of which I can never sufficient-
 “ ly apprehend, and the loss of which will
 “ make me utterly miserable? It is evi-
 “ dently the extreme of folly and madness,
 “ to put so immense a felicity to the least
 “ farther hazard for all the pleasures or
 “ profits of the world; I will delay no
 “ longer, but immediately devote myself
 “ to the service of God, and the prepara-
 “ tion for immortality.”

Let me now, as an Application of this subject, lead your thoughts to a few more of those important Reflections, which these interesting truths offer to us.

1. Is our life so like a flower in its short continuance, frailty, and uncertainty, let us ever regard it as such; not grow too fond of it, nor expect too much from it; but lay the weight of our expectations of happiness upon God and eternity, which
 alone

alone can support them. Most of the vexatious disappointments which persons receive from the world, and their state in it, arise from their wrong apprehensions of it. They expect that from life and the world, which God never designed they should give, a solid and lasting felicity; and neglect to seek it where it is alone to be found, in the favour of God, a consciousness of well-doing, and the good hope of a blessed immortality. It is not to be wondered at, if after this they complain and are wretched. A flower is designed only for amusement, or a slight refreshment; and the man who would lean on it, or live by it, has no one to blame but himself, if he miss support and satisfaction.

Let us take the present state as God designed it, for a scene of trial and exercise of our virtue and piety; and at most for yielding us proper refreshments on our journey to a better world, and we shall enjoy all that is good in it, and keep clear of those piercing vexations, which the vanity of the world causes to those, who lay the whole stress of their happiness upon it, or upon any thing it contains. If we center our hopes on God, and estimate our happiness by our title to his favour, by our growing resemblance to him in true goodness, and our meetness for his eternal pre-

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Gen. xv.

sence and love, we can never be disappointed as to our main good and pursuit, and may be always easy. For whatever changes we suffer in our outward estate, it will still be in our power to confirm and improve our interest in the favour of God, and the blessedness of eternity. Whether we are poor or rich, in sickness or health, whether relatives and friends are continued with us, or taken from us, we may discharge the duties of our several stations, promote our eternal interests, and look up to God as our guardian, our portion, and *exceeding great reward*. To be virtuous, benevolent, resigned, and devout is always in our power, and the only method to secure true contentment while we are here. The man who thus seeks happiness hath not only those peculiar and exalted satisfactions, which such a temper and conduct and a reflection upon them give; has not only the privilege of being secured from the anxiety and vexation, which a dependance upon uncertain things produces, but he is thus sure of enjoying all the good that is in them. Whereas the other overlooks the little reality, and grasping at too much misses it, and retains nothing but the shame and anguish of a disappointment.

Do I then enjoy health, a plentiful fortune, or a dear Relation and Friend, I will regard these not as my chief good, but as things

things naturally frail, imperfect, and uncertain, and raise my largest wishes to God, and fix my most delightful hopes on him, who is a good all perfect, satisfying, and everlasting. I will reckon nothing to be of very great importance to me, but the establishing an interest in his favour, and increasing it. And should I be deprived of the other will bear it with that temper, with which a subject passing to his Sovereign's Court, where he was assured of possessing an affluent fortune, and the highest honours, would bear some little losses or affronts on the road; especially when he knew, that his easily resigning every thing which retarded his journey, would be rewarded *an hundred fold*.

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Matt. xix.
29.

2. What has been offered will afford rational consolation under the loss of dear Relations, whether in the morning or noon of life. Hath death mown down the flowers in the height of their bloom, or hewn down the stately tree laden with fruit, and will they delight us no more? Yet if the seeds of religion and virtue inclosed in these flowers, if the tree bore the fruits of righteousness, beneficence, and piety, though now laid in the dust, these seeds shall spring, these fruits shall grow, and yield a glorious harvest in the morning of the resurrection. Their virtues and good qualities are indeed lost to us, but not to themselves. The
stroke

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stroke that removed them from us, lodged them beyond the reach of all the imperfections, sufferings, temptations, and dangers of this mortal state, and effectually secured the immortal part with all its valuable interests. And as for the body, which seems to have suffered so heavily by the blow, even that will be a gainer; though reduced to corruption and dishonour. 'Tis indeed

1 Cor. xv. *sown in corruption, but it shall be raised in*
42, 43. *incorruption; sown in dishonour, but it shall be raised in glory.*

3. Is our life so frail, let us not hazard our eternal concerns any more on the presumption of its long continuance, but with the utmost diligence and speed secure them. To observe at what a rate the generality throw away their time, how pleased they are with opportunities of losing it, and how much obliged they think themselves to any who help them to get rid of the burthen, would tempt one to think that either they had an immense quantity of it at their command, or that it was not improveable to any valuable purpose. Who could think that the life of these persons was at longest very short, their tenure of it quite uncertain; and that eternal happiness or everlasting destruction depended on their employing it well or ill? Who could think that persons who give such large portions of it to what they own to be trifles, and

from

from which they pretend to expect no other benefit, than that of passing away their time without feeling the weight of it, were capable of a constant proficiency in knowledge, goodness, and devotion, were designed for a divine and everlasting felicity; and that their title to it depended on the present use they made of their uncertain time; and that the degrees of their final blessedness would be determined by their present attainments in religion, and usefulness to mankind?

Am I then young? Instead of thinking it the privilege of this age to sport time away, let me rejoice in the immense goodness of God, who has put it into my power, by a continual proficiency in virtue and piety, to secure the largest share of an everlasting reward. Let me be deeply affected with the loss of so many opportunities which I can never recover, and consequently of so many degrees of a divine felicity. When I am at a loss to dispose of my time, let me ask myself, am I as well acquainted with the works and perfections of God, with his will, and the conditions of eternal blessedness; and so firmly established in the belief of the great truths of religion, as I need to be? Have I purged out all those vices, which are contrary to the purity and goodness of that Being, in whose favour I hope to be happy; and may I not well employ

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employ my time in discovering and correcting these? Have I all those graces and virtues which will qualify me for the society and employments of the heavenly world; or can I better employ my time than in such reading, meditation, and converse, as are proper to implant or cherish these? Might I not increase my knowledge and abilities for doing good, or if I attended to it, discover several opportunities within my reach for doing it; and would not the employment of time this way turn to infinite advantage?

Would not the satisfactions attending such an improvement, and the cheering reflections upon it, more than balance the labours necessary to bring my mind to this temper, and far exceed all the pleasures of indolence or sport; and will not the fruits of everlasting blessedness which it produces, much more exceed them? Or am I held up merely by the slender thread of life from irreparable ruin, and can I be secure when I observe it so frequently breaking where it appears strongest, and when my sins are such a weight upon it? Does eternal life depend on mortifying the several inclinations and habits of vice, and cultivating, during the present season, the habits of holiness? Is this season at longest short, and the continuance of it for a day or an hour to me quite uncertain? And

can

can I reasonably trifle any longer? Let me consider what it is I risk, a heaven of compleat, divine, and everlasting joys, a state where the imperfections and sufferings of the present will be for ever unknown, where my body shall enjoy consummate beauty and vigour, perpetual ease, and immortal health; where my soul shall be compleat in all it's powers, and both body and soul in full possession of all the satisfactions that suit this perfect state, that suit a rational and immortal Being; where, in a word, I shall know, love, and enjoy God, and be like to him in purity and goodness; see my Redeemer in the height of glory and felicity, triumph in his exaltation, and venerate and love him worthily; converse with angels and kindred minds, and with them continually improve in knowledge, friendship, benevolence, and felicity.

And may I yet secure this inestimable blessedness, and is the continuance of my opportunities for it, uncertain as the beauty and life of a flower; and can I be a moment longer in suspense? The world cannot recompence me, for the least further risk I run of losing this blessedness; and shall I chuse to hazard it for a most inconsiderable part of the world? Others have done it, and for ever lost heaven; what tormenting self-reflections, what horrors of guilt

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Isa. lv. 6.
Phil. ii.
12.
Heb. iv.
7.

2 Tim.
i. 10.

guilt are their portion! What would they give for the least opportunity, that I perhaps am foolishly bent to throw away? I can never too soon secure happiness, or gain too much of it; *I will seek the Lord while he may be found, and work out my salvation to-day*, lest to-morrow it should be for ever too late.

Finally; how thankful should we be to God for the promise of immortality, and that he has put it into our power, by sacrificing the pleasures or profits of sin, during so frail and short a life, to secure this immortality of blessedness; and how guilty and wretched will they render themselves, who refuse this sacrifice! *Christ has brought life and immortality to light by his Gospel.* The promises of a resurrection and life eternal, which he made the world in the name of God, he fully confirmed by raising the dead to life, and by rising himself from the dead on the third day, and visibly ascending into the heaven which he promised. And what a happy change in the present scene does the breaking in of this light create! The hopes of an eternal heaven are fitted to inspire nobler satisfactions, than his earthly paradise could give to Adam; and we can now thank God for the imperfection, vanity, and short duration of the present scene. The more vain and unsatisfying, the less force has it to detain

detain us from seeking heaven; and the shorter it's continuance, the sooner shall we enter on immortality. And then how inexcusable must we own all those to be, whom the temptations of this short and imperfect state prevail on, to give up their interest in the other.

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When one hears of something which men prefer to heaven, and everlasting happiness, the enjoyment of which also is confined to this short life, one is ready to imagine, it must be some extraordinary good, the quintessence of happiness drawn together, a taste of which so many chuse before the rivers of pleasure flowing from the throne of God for ever. Were it valuable in the highest degree, so as to surpass heaven for the time, yet when heaven is sure and everlasting, it must be strange, that any can hesitate between them, and even prefer a world that is passing away. But how is the wonder increased when we find, that the happiness of worldlings is nothing but amusing and forgetting themselves for a little while, and keeping off all apprehensions of their wants and dangers, without supplying the one, and removing the other. A happiness which will no more bear examining, than a flower rough handling; and a happiness with which they themselves are often disgusted and complain. And to make the infatuation still more astonishing,

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ing, the duties and dispositions, on which their title depends, are the principal sources of present satisfaction.

The folly of such a choice is so great, that it would be incredible any should be guilty of it, did we not every day see numerous instances. The senses of men determine them before their reason is capable of directing them; and when it becomes fit to direct, a custom of chusing and acting according as the senses dictate, determine them to continue it. They then persist in preferring sensual indulgences, not because they are happy in them, but because they find themselves uneasy in the want of them; and cannot resolve on the labours and self-denials, necessary to acquire the temper and pleasures of religion.

This therefore should recommend the present choice of religion, especially to the young, before they are possessed by other inclinations and habits, and while they may with the most ease become religious, and enjoy the most pleasure in it. Should you thoughtlessly let slip this opportunity, who can assure you that you will be wise enough to improve a less favourable one? Or who can promise you that you shall ever have another, and not for ever lose this infinite blessedness which is again offered unto you? Think then, whether you have experienced, or can believe there is
any

any thing in the world that can compensate you for such a loss. Do not therefore suffer the hope of being wiser hereafter to tempt you to such a folly. But be immediately religious in secret, as well as public; devote yourselves to the study and practice of religion, and the preparing for heaven, by improving your minds in all valuable knowledge, and every virtue, and doing all the good you can. For though you are yet in your flower, daily instances, as well as the sacred Writer, assure you, that *man cometh up like a flower, and is cut down.* If you are surprized before a religious temper is formed, as you are *cut down, you will be cast into the fire.* But if it be formed, though you are taken off suddenly, you will be transplanted to a happier clime, where you shall grow and flourish in goodness and felicity for ever. *Amen.*

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T O T H E

Congregation of Protestant Dissenters
of the new Meeting in *Taunton*.

My dear Friends,

WHEN the tenderness of my regard for a People, among whom I had spent many years, with satisfaction to myself, and I hope not unusefully to them, would not admit my preaching a farewell Sermon in form; I thought the end of such a discourse might be as well answered, by closing my Ministry amongst you with the sentiments contained in the following Discourses, as supplying some of the most powerful motives and encouragements to a life of uniform piety and goodness.

Your favourable acceptance and earnest desire determined me to print them, that I might leave them with you as a publick and lasting testimony, of my grateful sense of that generous and affectionate esteem and friendship which I long experienced from you; and of my concern that you
might

might ever cultivate that habitual piety of disposition, which will animate you to all goodness, give the most solid satisfactions in this life, and be your best preparation for the blessedness of the life to come. That these Discourses also, in conjunction with the Sermons on *Morning and Evening Devotion*, compleat the delineation of a life of habitual piety, made me more ready to gratify your request in printing them; and for promoting this temper I jointly recommend them to your serious perusal, and to the divine blessing.

Though the Providence of God hath removed me to a distance, and put an end to my stated labours for promoting your best interests, death alone will put an end to my concern for your happiness in time and to eternity. While I was with you, I honestly endeavoured in a diligent study of the Scriptures, to discover the whole counsel of God for your salvation. And what I thus found, I fairly represented to you, without a servile regard to human schemes and party notions; considering myself as the disciple of Christ, and him alone as my Master in Religion; and I can do you the justice to testify, that as faithful subjects of our common Lord, you encouraged me herein. In particular, as to the essential goodness of our heavenly Father, and the extent of his grace to us in

Christ Jesus, *who would have all men to be saved*; it was my constant endeavour to set it before you in a light, which might dispose all sinners to repentance, and encourage every humble and serious person in working out their salvation, and preparing themselves for an immortality of holiness and happiness. And I promise myself you will *stand fast in the grace which is in Christ Jesus*, rejecting all those notions which would obscure the glory of the divine goodness; or leave it a doubt to any one in earnest solicitous for his salvation, whether God would assist and accept him. And as to practical Religion, you know with what plainness and warmth I have recommended to you a sincere and universal conformity of heart and life to the laws of Christ; particularly warning you of all those vices, which according to the express declarations of the New Testament, will if indulged exclude the guilty from everlasting blessedness. So that should any continue to indulge them to their ruin, I shall be found guiltless of their blood; having also endeavoured that my own conduct might be consistent with my exhortations.

I thank God, and I thank many of you, my worthy Friends, for the satisfaction which I have received from your piety and goodness, as well as from your friendship
to

to me. May you go on improving under the ministry of your worthy Pastor, my Successor, and become perfect in every good disposition and work. And as for those with whom I have not had all the success I desired, may God make his ministry more effectual than mine; that if possible not one soul may finally perish, but all rejoice together in the day of the Lord Jesus, that we have not laboured, nor you heard and believed in vain.

And now Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, who is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified. May he bless you, and your pious and judicious Pastor, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus. May you prosper, and be in health, but above all things may your souls prosper. And though separated for a time, may we all meet in the noble assembly of just spirits made perfect, and be all presented at last faultless before the glorious presence of God with exceeding joy.

These are great expectations; let us live worthy of them. In a few years more this world will be nothing to any of us. And they who have sought their happiness in the things of it, with the neglect of religion and immortality, must sink into despair and everlasting destruction; whereas

they who cultivate a devout, beneficent, and heavenly temper, when they are removed from this world will be joined to an *innumerable company of angels*, to the *spirits* of the pious and good of all ages and countries, consummate in holiness; to God the Father and *Judge of all*, and to *Jesus the Mediator*, and shall enter upon a divine felicity, which will improve upon enjoyment. And after enjoying for thousands of years a blessedness, to which this world hath nothing comparable, they shall be able with triumph to look forward to millions of ages, to an eternity of improving perfection and felicity, as their certain portion and reward.

May we answerably love God and the Redeemer, who have provided this immense felicity for us, and called us to the glorious hope, and to the most effectual means for attaining it. May we treat with disdain every temptation of the world, which would divert us from securing it, and be *stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour in the Lord cannot be in vain*. Then shall the remainder of our days on earth be happy in the favour and blessing of our heavenly Father, and in that peace which the world cannot give or take away, our dying hours serene and full of hope,
and

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and our following eternity blessed above all present conception and hope.

This will ever be the prayer, and to promote this desirable end, as any future opportunities shall offer, the delightful endeavour of,

My dear Friends,

Your affectionate and faithful

Servant in Christ Jesus,

London, November 12, 1759.

THOMAS AMORY.



S E R M O N X V I I .

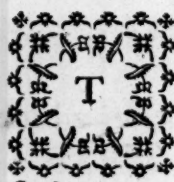
The Character of the habitually
Religious.



P S A L M xvi. 8.

*I have set the Lord always before me ; be-
cause he is at my right-hand, I shall not
be moved.*

S E R M O N
X V I I .

 H E S E words express the senti-
ments of a truly pious person,
and in this view I shall now
consider them; without con-
fining your attention to any peculiar re-
ference they might have to the circum-
stances of *David*, at the time of his com-
posing this sacred hymn, or to the *Messiah*,
of whom *David* was an illustrious type,
and to whom several verses of this psalm
are applied in the New Testament, and
evidently

evidently belong. The piety of *David*, and of the *Messiah*, are recorded for our imitation. And it is the duty of all to cultivate that habitual regard to an ever-present God, which is expressed in the text; and all who will acquire the temper shall enjoy the happiness, by the divine promise annexed to it. *I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right-hand I shall not be moved.* “ Human life
“ is full of troubles, temptations, and
“ changes; it is therefore my resolution
“ to have God perpetually in my view;
“ that by his help I may be preserved safe
“ and unshaken amidst them all.”

That I may assist you in executing this resolution, I will,

- I. Enumerate some of the principal acts of the mind, which this *setting the Lord always before us* includes.
- II. Mention the relations, in which it will be useful to represent God to ourselves in the course of life.
- III. Instance some special seasons, in which *setting the Lord before us* will be of considerable service to us. And,
- IV. Represent the happy effects of this pious course of life; *because he is at my right-hand, I shall not be moved.*

I. I would enumerate some of the principal acts of the mind, included in thus
setting

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Setting the Lord always before us. And it supposes an habitual prevailing regard to the divine presence—Frequent actual thoughts of God occasionally offering themselves to the mind, and intermingling in the common train of our affairs—A constant aim to please God in all our actions, by conforming them to his will as their prime and perfect rule—Making God the object of our imitation—Keeping a steady eye upon the ways of his Providence, and with a filial trust, and hope, and dependence referring ourselves to his conduct and blessing—And, finally, proposing as our chief end the glory of God in our full salvation and happiness.

1. *Setting the Lord always before us*, implies an habitual regard to the divine presence. A fixed belief that wherever we are, God is with us, Psal. cxxxix. 1. *About our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways; so that there is not a thought in our heart, nor a word on our tongue but he knoweth it altogether* *. Is there any place so secret that the workers of iniquity may hide themselves? So solitary and dismal, that good men find themselves remote from all succour, heavenly as well as earthly? There may be barren deserts, in which no human footsteps are

* Some proofs supplied by Reason of the divine Omnipresence—See in *Daily Devotion*, &c. Sermon i.

to be seen, no dwellings of mankind, but not where we may not easily discover by the darting light, the springy air, and various vegetable and animal productions, not only that God has been, but is there continually. *Whither shall we go from his spirit, or whither flee from his presence? If we ascend up into heaven he is there, if we make our bed in bades, in the chambers of the dead, behold he is there. Alike present in the visible and invisible worlds, ruling and disposing the dead and the living. If we take the wings of the morning, could we be mounted on the morning ray in an instant, flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, and dwell there; even there shall his hand lead us, and his right-hand shall hold us. If we say surely the darkness shall cover us, even the night shall be light about us. The darkness hideth not from him, but the light shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him.*

The man who seteth God before him, believeth these descriptions of the divine omnipresence to be exactly true; and he hath his mind so strongly, so constantly impressed by this persuasion, as to be always influenced by it, though he does not always expressly reflect upon it. This belief in respect of the truly good man is like some other things, which having a full possession of the mind and heart, may be unattended to

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to for a time, but are never wholly disregarded; so as to admit of a man's acting quite otherwise than he would do, if he had these things present to his thoughts. Habitual knowledge and faith are never without their influence, when once the soul is thoroughly enlightened and penetrated by them. Let me steadfastly believe this and the other truth, not barely the reality but the importance of it also, let it strike upon my soul and awaken and engage my affections, and it will be impossible for me so to forget it, as that my designs and actions shall not even insensibly be directed by it. Other things will sometimes unavoidably take up the thoughts of the best men, there is no helping this in their present situation and circumstances; but by the whole course of their behaviour you may observe, that this is their motto, *Thou Lord seest me*. Their conversation will never bear to be interpreted in such language, as that of the libertines and ungodly sinners, represented in the book of *Job* xxii. 12. *Is not God in the height of the heavens? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are. How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven,* not regarding what is done here below. This is not the lan-

guage of that man's actions, who hath set the Lord before him. His belief of the divine omnipresence is like a spring, which though unseen imparts a vigorous activity and direction to the whole course of his life.

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2. *Seting the Lord always before us*, denotes frequent actual thoughts of God, occasionally offering themselves to the mind, and intermingling in the common train of our affairs. It is the character of the wicked, that they *forget God*, that *they have not God in all their thoughts*, Psal. l. 22. not willingly, not delightfully; at least, not unless they have a wrong notion of God, as more merciful than holy; and as having a love to them, though they are without love to that which is good. When men set up such an idol as this in their imaginations, instead of the true idea of God, it is not impossible that they may please themselves with it, being their own work; and having no frown on his look, or thunder in his hand, to deter them from a free indulgence to their vices. But the thoughts of an holy God, infinite in all moral perfections, they can by no means entertain. *God is light*, such a light as men of impure minds can no more delight in, than birds of the night in the clear sun-shine. This being a description of the wicked, we must suppose the contrary true,

John i.
5.

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true, with regard to all sincere and pious minds. Being lovers of God they cannot but love the thoughts of God; and what they love they will entertain themselves with, as they have opportunity and invitation. A thought of God in the midst of their ordinary business, will not give them any interruption; it does not require much time, nor will it cost them much pains, to turn their minds towards God in a pious ejaculation, and to raise their thoughts to his throne.

A thousand things will occur to occasion their calling God to remembrance, his judgments or his mercies; meeting with the marks of his wisdom and power and goodness, and providential government of the world, every where. And when there are such a multitude of fair hints to put them in mind of God, no truly pious person can overlook them all.

The thoughts of God will be his choice, and his delight; will help to correct the vanity of his other thoughts, to prevent their wandering beyond proper bounds, and to make every object and event instructive. Cannot the good man say in this sense, *how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!* Not only thy thoughts of mercy towards me, but my thoughts of veneration, love, and confidence towards God. *How great is the sum of them! When I awake, I am still*

still with thee. My greatest grief is that they are not more. I would not miss an occasion to lift my heart to God in warm thoughts, and secret acts of praise and gratitude. SERMON
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It can hardly be conceived that persons in the lowest class of the truly devout can be contented to pass the day without all such occasional thoughts of God; or that an habitual regard to God can be maintained, without some such actual remembrance of him. Actual thoughts of God are necessary to beget that disposition, in which the very essence of piety consists; and not less needful to preserve, much more to perfect this good disposition, than to produce it at first. For all impressions of the Deity which are not thus refreshed, partly by set and solemn thoughts of God, and partly by those which are more transient and occasional, will be gradually effaced and vanish. Nor can the good man when he begs of God to *remember him, and his former loving-kindnesses towards him*; be satisfied to forget God. He considers that it would be unreasonable to desire of God, what he will not practise himself. When the remembrance is not mutual, though strictly speaking God does not forget, yet it cannot be expected that he should remember us in mercy.

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3. Another particular implied *in setting the Lord always before us*, is a constant aim to please God in all our actions, by conforming them to his will as their supreme and most infallible rule. “How shall I
“ walk so as to please God? How avoid
“ offending him? I can truly say that the
“ former of these is the thing that I most
“ desire, but the latter that which of all
“ things I most dread. And has not God
“ *shewn me what is good, and what he re-*
“ *quires of me? To do justice, and to love*
“ *mercy, and to walk humbly with him.*
“ What is good in his judgment, and
“ ought therefore to be so, in mine, since
“ he is never mistaken. Ought not his
“ will always to determine me? Yes, O
“ Lord, I readily own it, and therefore
“ resolve, that not my own will, not the
“ will of any of my fellow-creatures, but
“ thine shall be the decisive measure of my
“ conduct.”

Perhaps in such a way I could please my fancy best, and gratify those inclinations which I find it difficult to deny. Perhaps, I cannot be in favour with such and such persons, or succeed in such or such a design unless I will take this course. But let me first enquire, whether in following this method I shall not contradict my duty to God; for this is the principal question with me, and that which I have resolved shall

shall regulate all my reasonings and motions. This one point being secured, that I shall not displease God, I am then at liberty to act one way or another, as other views shall direct me. Nor has God so confined or restrained me by his commands, but that I have all the liberty I can justly desire. I have the liberty to do any thing but hurt myself or others. I have full freedom to pursue my true happiness; to be as good myself, and to do as much good to others as I will. I cannot please God better than in making use of this freedom, in which he will give me all needful assistance and encouragement. God hath left me free to do good; but not to do evil; to make myself happy but not to ruin myself; and I cannot surely complain of this as any hardship. God does not exercise his sovereign authority over us by unnecessary injunctions; and such as would render life a burden; no, but in the kindest, gentlest, and most beneficial commands. To please him, we have little else to do, but to follow the dictates of our own reason, when it is properly enlightened.

Let me add, this is a noble and a wise design to please God. He is the best of Beings, infinitely exalted above all that is called good or great; and therefore to please him must be a laudable ambition, and an instance of the highest wisdom;

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because

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because we cannot sincerely aim to please God, but we shall actually please him; nor please God, but in so doing we shall secure our happiness in time and to eternity.

4. *To set the Lord always before us*, is to make him the object of our zealous imitation; our pattern after which we endeavour to copy in our poor measure and degree. It is a great advantage to have a perfect model or original to direct and assist our endeavours. Such a glorious original have all other intelligent beings, in that infinite Being who is at their head. But if angels, those sons of light, who dwell before the throne, and behold the face of the divine majesty, may think of resembling God, and catching some rays of his perfections, so as to form something of an image of God on their minds; is it for us at this distance from the regions of bliss and glory, immersed in flesh and sense, and surrounded with vanity and numberless temptations—is it for us to form any such bold design? Yes, mortal men, as well as the immortal angels, have this pattern set before them; and though they must fall much shorter of it than the angels, yet shall not their attempts, if persevering, be in vain.

Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect; saith the only begotten Son of God, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and

Matt. v.
48.

Heb. i. 3.

and the express image of his perfections; *so much better than the angels themselves, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* And can the Son of God command us to do a thing, which it is impossible for us to perform; or which is performed by none of his disciples? We cannot think so without derogating from his wisdom or sincerity. We may be perfect according to our measure, and that is all he requires. We shall be so compleatly in the next life, and we should be still approaching to this state of perfection while we are in this. And we shall do it, if we be *followers of God as dear children, setting him always before us*; delineating him in our understandings by the most just and lovely ideas we can form of his moral attributes; his righteousness, goodness, mercy, truth and faithfulness; and from these under his favouring influences tracing out the likeness of them upon our hearts, that there may be as near a conformity as possible between our governing disposition, and our ideas of moral goodness and righteousness. And this all the genuine disciples of Jesus, all the real children of God endeavour. They continually labour this grand point to become more Godlike; esteeming this a much greater honour, than it would be to appear in all the grandeur of earthly majesty. This latter they are sen-

Eph. v. 1.

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fible is no other than the shadow of true greatness, fit only to ingage weak minds, who penetrate no farther than the outside of things; whereas a divine resemblance ennobles the mind, and makes us lovely in the sight of God.

5. Keeping a steddy eye upon the ways of God's Providence, and with a filial trust and dependence, refering ourselves to his conduct, disposal and blessing, are a part of their character *who set the Lord always before them*. The inspired Psalmist has observed of persons who give up themselves to sensual indulgences, and walk after their own lusts, that they *regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands*. Or if some extraordinary

Psalm
xxviii. 5.

event in the way of judgment or mercy awaken their attention for a little time, yet they soon forget his works, and relapse into their former stupid disregard of every thing, that does not immediately affect the interests and pleasures of this life. But this is not the way of the righteous, who as they believe the doctrine of divine Providence, act conformably to their belief. According to their creed, chance hath nothing to do, properly speaking, in the affairs of the world; what is called chance in respect of men, who are many times surprized and disappointed by the unlikely arrival

arrival of events, being dependent upon the foresight and direction of God.

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Hence they are said to acknowledge God in all their ways, which they believe to be subject to his conduct, and which they are above all things desirous should be directed by him. While they acknowledge secret things to belong to God, and pretend not to dive into the hidden counsels of heaven, they are ever attentive to those instructions, which may be gathered from the dispensations of Providence in every age of the world, (as far as they are made acquainted with them) and particularly those which fall under their own observation, and within the compass of their own time and experience. For they have very good reason to think that these instructions were designed for them, to make them both wiser and better; more easy with regard to affairs of a public concern, and those also which relate more particularly to themselves. Their reflections upon things may not always go very deep, yet are they of great use to them; there being many instructions obvious enough to an inquiring mind, and highly worthy their observation.

Such are God's manner of ordering or permitting things in the world, and in the Church, and the wise and good ends intended and served by them. Thus he considers *heresies and divisions* to be wisely

1 Cor. xi.
19.

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1 Pet. i. 7.

permitted in the church; that charity and a stedfast love to truth may be exercised and manifested; persecutions permitted, that the sincere may be refined, approve their love to God, to Christ and goodness, and attain great rewards in heaven. Or the follies, unkindness, or injustice of others permitted, that the good may be exercised and improved in meekness, gentleness, charity, and a chearful submission to God; be quickened in their preparation for a state of perfect goodness, and happiness, and increase their interest in it. These appearances, which by the disaffected to their Maker and his government, are turned into objections against his Providence, are improved by the truly pious to very different purposes. They consider them as calls to the practice of particular duties; or as means of their advancement in several necessary and useful virtues. Their trust in God and resignation to him become more absolute, their faith is tried and approved; they are taught to look off more from second causes, and piously to observe and humbly to adore the first. They learn to distinguish between what is human, and what is divine; that is, between the part which man has in events, and the management of affairs, whether agreeable, or otherwise; and that which is properly God's; attributing to men no more than belongs

belongs to them, whether of praise or blame, and acknowledging the superior wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God in all. Thus are they less moved with those things, which are the fruits of human folly and frailty, or passions, or even malice; because the divine Providence can over-rule them, so that they shall terminate in advancing the best interests of all who love God. To compleat this character,

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Rom. viii.
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6. They who *set the Lord always before them*, propose as their last end, the glory of God, in their final happiness and salvation. These two, really make but one end, how fond soever some have been to suppose them separated, that they might have an opportunity for making the greater sacrifice to God. It is impossible that God should be glorified by the damnation of any one soul that truly loves him. It ought not therefore, to be made a test of that love, that for God's sake a man is contented to suffer everlasting banishment and destruction from his presence. What God cannot enjoin, or man perform, ought not to be supposed. It answers no good end, but may be and often is attended with consequences very bad. It is enough that all persons of real integrity and devotion aim at the glory of God, in connection with their own happiness. They can

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cheerfully forego any temporal interest, and sacrifice their ease or safety; yea, the dearest delights of life, and even life itself, if they may hereby promote the cause of God and religion, and give an useful example of obedience and submission to his will.

The whole course of their actions is animated by this end; and the prospect of future happiness affords them greater pleasure when they consider, that the glory of God will therein attain its utmost height, and shine out like the sun in its meridian splendor, when the happiness of his creatures shall be carried to its utmost degree of perfection. The pious man can no more be indifferent to the glory of God, than the man can be to his own happiness. As in all our actions, therefore, we are influenced and governed by the general desire of happiness, whether we think of it, or no, so we shall be by a prevailing desire to glorify God, if we have chosen him for our portion.

The rule prescribed by the apostle Paul, is, *whether we eat or drink, or whatever else we do, to do all to the glory of God.* That is to consider how we may most advance the interests of virtue and piety in every action, which is capable of having an influence upon these. And this excellent rule is founded on the example of his
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1 Cor. x.
31.

and our Lord, who never sought his own glory, but the glory of his Father who sent him. This example, or rule, is followed more or less exactly, by every sincere disci-
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John vii,
18.

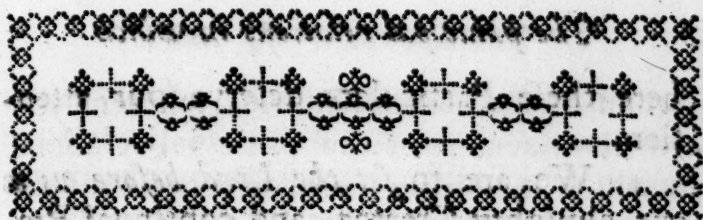
ple of Jesus. Is the general course of my behaviour so ordered as to tend to the glory of God, or which is the same to the credit of religion; so as to be fitted to communicate more worthy sentiments of God, and religion, and more friendly dispositions towards them? In acting after this, or that manner, shall I glorify God? Shall I not dishonour him? This is the least we can do, to be careful that none of our actions have a tendency to make the name of God dishonoured, and his ways evil spoken of. And as to many of our ordinary actions, which in their own nature are perfectly indifferent, this is all that we can be solicitous about, that what we do shall not contradict the end we have in view of glorifying God. Take the whole scope of our lives together, and it must plainly look this way, and so must the more important actions of life; nor must the more common actions of life have any circumstances attending them, which do not suit with the dignity, holiness, and charity of our christian profession.

This concludes the first General, and explains what is meant by *setting the Lord always before us*. I shall refer the
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second to the next Discourse, wherein you will have a view of the principal relations in which it will be useful to represent God to ourselves throughout the course of our lives.

SER-



S E R M O N XVIII.

The principal Relations in which
we are to regard God.



PSALM xvi. 8.

*I have set the Lord always before me; be-
cause he is at my right-hand, I shall not
be moved.*

 N discoursing on these words, I SERMON
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proposed,

I. To give you a distinct view
of the several pious acts and dis-
positions, which are included in *setting the
Lord always before us*. This was done in
the preceding Discourse. I am now,

II. To consider the principal relations
in which it will be useful to represent God
to ourselves in the course of life. And
here

here these Particulars deserve our attention.

I. We are to *set the Lord before us* as our almighty Creator, and continual Preserver and Benefactor. I put these together, because creation without preservation would signify little ; since if the hand that formed us did not uphold us in life, we should immediately sink again into the dust. Not any one thing we see is the work of chance, not a flower or weed that grows upon the earth, no, not the smallest particle of matter, much less man, whose body in the whole frame of it, and in every part, manifests admirable wisdom and contrivance; and the nature and faculties of whose soul have something in them far more admirable, than the most surprizing things belonging to his body.

If we inquire, *where is the Lord our Maker*, we cannot be long in finding him. He must be one of infinite power and wisdom, or he could not have given existence to us, and to innumerable more such beings as we are ; that is, our Maker is God, who must also be continually present with his works, which he continually produces and preserves. And shall we not *remember our Creator*, who has so honourably distinguished us among his works ? How is it that we know any thing, and remember any thing ? Is it not by his gift ? And shall

we not endeavour to know and remember the giver? That we are rational creatures, capable of nobler operations and of a higher happiness than the beasts of the field, which God has appointed to serve us, we owe to his free goodness; who hath not brought us into being, and then left us to shift for ourselves. Alas, the helpless infant, cast out to perish by want, or by the next accident, is not in a more forlorn condition, than we should be on this supposition. It is true by those powers which God has given us, we can concur to our own preservation; but without the concurrence of divine Providence, all that we could do would avail nothing. And who is it preserves those very powers of action? “ Yes, “ O Lord, thou art our Preserver, as well “ as our Creator; and that, notwithstanding the brittleness of our frame, and the “ numberless accidents which surround “ us, we are alive to this day, we ascribe “ to thy gracious visitations which uphold “ our life, and to thy kind protection by “ which it is guarded.”

Nor does God barely preserve our life; this he might do, and we be wretched, and rather than be miserable, better not be at all; the goodness of God which follows us all our days makes life desirable, fills our mouths with good, and our hearts with joy. And shall we rejoice in our being,
and

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and not rejoice in God the author of it, and of all those mercies which render it a blessing? To God we are indebted for any enjoyment we have of ourselves, and of other things, and shall we forget him, who constantly remembers us for good? How is it that we have every sense and every faculty intire? Is it not because he continues them to us, who first gave them? Certainly then we ought to resolve, that we will employ them in his service. Is he not our daily Benefactor; yea, do not we every hour receive some favour or other at his hand, who continually produces the blessings which the earth yields us, and favourably situates us for enjoying them? And shall we not devote every day, and every hour to him, and always live to his praise? Since we continually depend upon him, should we not continually set him before us, and love and serve him with our whole heart?

2. We are to *set Jehovah always before us*, as our Lord, our rightful Sovereign, our wise and holy Governor. There cannot be a better title to dominion, than that founded in creation and continual preservation. He who made us, hath evidently a right to govern us, and dispose of us, as seemeth good in his sight. And he is not only of right our Lord and Ruler, but in fact. He exercises that right which is inherently

herently and unalienably in him. That he governs the world is not less evident than that he made and preserves it. If he preserves persons and things, he preserves them for some valuable purposes; and for whatever purposes he preserves them, to these by his unerring counsel he directs them. And the so guiding and ordering his creatures according to their respective natures, that they may answer the ends and uses to which they are severally fitted, is what we mean by the divine government. And how shall rational beings answer the ends and uses to which they are adapted, without a proper employment of their faculties; or how employ their faculties as they ought, if they have no rules prescribed them for their conduct? Or how can it be supposed that a wise God should prescribe rules of conduct to his rational creatures, and take no notice whether they observe or violate them, in order to reward them for the one, and punish them for the other? And in these two, giving laws to mankind and other intelligent beings, and encouraging the observation of them, consists what we call God's moral government.

Let us consider, as we are reasonable beings, capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of doing the one and forbearing the other, it would be absurd
to

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to imagine, that our Maker has left us at our liberty, to act just as fancy, inclination, or passion prompt us. Certainly he hath endowed us with reason and freedom of choice; for some better purposes than this; that we might attend to the discoveries which he hath made of his will by the voice of nature or revelation; and regard every such intimation of his pleasure as an inviolable rule of behaviour. The dictates of reason and the precepts of holy Scripture, are the laws of the most high God; laws suited to the holiness of his own nature, and fitted to promote the perfection of ours. These laws he hath guarded by proper sanctions, and these sanctions he will not fail to see executed, by distributing rewards or punishments, agreeably to the behaviour of his creatures upon the whole. And in the mean while he deals with us, and disposes of us, during our state of trial, as seems to him best, whose wisdom is infinite, and from whose judgment there is no appeal. And in every part of his Government, and in every dispensation of his Providence he exerts and displays those attributes which are the glory of his nature; it being impossible that there should not be the most perfect harmony between the nature of God and his works.

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This is a reflection which we should often make. The God, to whose government and disposal we are perpetually subject, is a most wise, righteous, and gracious Sovereign. He is holy, and will not therefore always bear with those of his rational creatures, who are unholy. He hates sin, and will therefore sooner or later punish it; if it is not undone by repentance; where else would be his wisdom and justice? His justice is supported by almighty power; so that if he does not call men to account, the reason is not, that he cannot do it. And if he can, he will; since his essential perfections, and vindicating the rights of his government demand it. And then for the encouragement of all humble and upright souls we can add, he is good as well as righteous, merciful as well as holy. His government therefore, though holy is not severe, but tempered with all the mildness and compassion, which the frailty of our nature, and the temptations and imperfections attending our state can be supposed to require. He is not an hard Master, or an inexorable Judge; but will distinguish between the weak and the wicked, between the humble and the proud, between the penitent and the obstinate and incorrigible transgressor. The ends of government may require the correction even of those, who in

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1 Cor.
xi. 32.

the main behave in a dutiful manner towards him; but if he correct he will not destroy them. Nay, he therefore judges them in this way now, that he may not *condemn them with the world*, and never chastens them but in measure. Did we *set the Lord before us* in these several views, as our rightful Sovereign, our wise, holy, and gracious Governor and Disposer, it would be exceeding useful to preserve us in the way of our duty, and to inspire us with submission and contentment under all the dispensations of divine Providence.

2 Cor.
vi. 17.

3. We christians should *set the Lord before us*, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him more nearly related to us than to the rest of the world, who are ignorant of a Saviour, being our God in covenant. It is a great advantage this, to be able to regard the Almighty as standing in a covenant-relation to us. And how does he this, but by the revelation of the Gospel? This is the covenant which he hath made with us, calling us out from the world, that we might be a *peculiar people to himself, zealous of good works, and not touch any unclean thing*. And upon this condition, he promises that he will be *our God*, and that we shall be *his sons and daughters*. Jesus Christ the Son of God is the *mediator* of this covenant. And what a mighty satisfaction is it, that we
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can look up to God as establishing his covenant with us to be our God, and to be every thing to us, and do every thing for us, with this only condition, that we will be to him for a *people*, and for a *praise in the earth*. Promises are essential to a covenant, and this covenant is not without them, either on God's part or on ours. He who was absolutely free and independent, hath been pleased to bind himself to us by promises; and is this a small matter? Or having this privilege of laying hold of the promises of God, and trusting to his immutable truth and faithfulness, shall we make no use of it? As he undertook to guide the *Israelites* through the wilderness, so he hath undertaken to be our guide through this world, though not in the same visible manner. Them he guided by a pillar of fire and of a cloud; us he will guide by his Word, his Providence and his Spirit, of which having his promise we can no more reasonably doubt, than they could of his making good his engagements to them. The Word of God is always and to all persons alike invariably faithful.

By this covenant we have every thing secured to us necessary for our temporal or spiritual safety, for our bodies or souls, for time or eternity. And is it so, that God hath taken us into his covenant, that we not only belong to his larger family the

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world; but to that more beloved part of it, the church? That we are not only servants but children? That besides the goodness and mercifulness of his nature, we have his sacred and express word of promise upon which to found our hopes? And neglecting the consideration and improvement of all this, shall we act as if there was no such relation subsisting between God and us; and delight no more in the thoughts of God than if there was not? Hath the Almighty thus set us as a *seal on his heart*, and a *signet on his right hand*; and shall we forget to *set him before us*? If we could not think of God without terror, if we could not regard him, otherwise than as an offended God, clothed with dreadful majesty, and armed with power and vengeance, it were another case, and we should be more excusable in avoiding to think of him. But when this most glorious Being, to engage the hearts, as well as command the veneration of his creatures, represents himself in the most amiable and endearing manner, and gives us leave to call him *our God and Father*; no one who hath not his heart strangely alienated from God, and consequently from all good, will cast off a regard to God in the common conduct of life, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and
through

through him our God and Father in covenant.

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4. We should *set the Lord before us* as our chief, our ultimate, and everlasting good. He alone can be so, and we have no reason to doubt that he will, provided we sincerely chuse him as such. In vain do we set any thing else before us as our happiness. We might as well worship the creature, as expect our final felicity from it. Creatures may contribute as streams towards satisfying some of our lower desires, and supplying some of our inferior wants, but as the Creator is the fountain who feeds those streams, and without him they would soon cease to run, and could afford no refreshment; so it is immediately from the fountain alone, that we can fill the largest capacities of our souls, and satisfy their noblest desires of happiness. Till we return to this fountain, life is one continued wandring from the way of happiness as well as of truth.

“ Yes, O Lord, I acknowledge it to be
“ the great honour of my nature, that no
“ created good is commensurate to it; as
“ it will be my misery, if this falling so
“ much short of my end, I do not look
“ out for some other. The greater the
“ happiness of which thou hast made me
“ capable, the greater will be my misery,
“ if through my own fault I miss this
F f 3 “ happiness.

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“ happiness. And my own fault it must
“ be, since God has shewn me where to
“ seek it, even in himself, and has pro-
“ mised that if I seek, I shall certainly
“ find.”

Here therefore let us fix, God is our portion, all other things without him are but shadows of felicity. And if we so esteem them, as we must, if we make a right estimate of our happiness, we shall not look so much to them as to God, we shall pursue them with less ardor, and seek the divine favour with more. We cannot set God before us as our chief good, while our hearts are indifferent to him, and we have no aspirations after the joys of his presence. They who have the truth of virtue and religion in them, cannot allow themselves in this state of indifference. For some time indeed, through the incursion of an uncommon temptation, they may be drawn to seek their happiness elsewhere; but the enchantment cannot hold long, the state is too unnatural for a pious mind to continue therein; it returns to it's rest lamenting its folly, and resolving that it will not be again so seduced. What is this transitory world to me, or any of it's dying enjoyments? 'Tis not my chief happiness, 'tis not an essential part of it. *One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord*

Psal.
xxvii. 4.

Lord for ever; even in his presence above; that I may ascend his holy hill, and there praise him; and enjoy the emanations of his favour with the adoring multitudes who are about the throne. And to prepare for that blessed state shall be my chief business, while I continue to sojourn here below, that I may not when I leave this world be found without the qualification for the heavenly blessedness. And the better qualified we are for future happiness, the more happy we shall be at present; not only as we shall rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but by virtue of this temper itself, which is the great foundation of happiness, and next to the enjoyment of God a principal part of it, and without it indeed there could be no such enjoyment.

Rom. v.

III. The next thing proposed was to instance some special seasons, when *setting the Lord before us*, in the manner just described, will be of great advantage to us. If on all such occasions we are careful to have God in our thoughts, we do in some sense set him always before us; as he who steadily observes the set times for prayer, as they come round, and who prays at any other time, when prayer may be thought peculiarly suitable, does in the language of scripture *pray always*. And which is farther to be considered, by a readiness to discern and embrace the special seasons for

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this pious practice, we shall be better disposed to it in our common conversation. As on the other hand, by maintaining a proper regard to God in our ordinary business and conversation, we shall be in a better preparation to pay a still more explicit regard to him on extraordinary occasions. I shall insist on the following special seasons for the exercise of this duty. When we have opportunities for doing good—when we meet with difficulties, opposition, reproach, and other discouragements, in pursuing the dictates of our consciences—in the management of trusts—when we are taking some important steps in life—in a time of adversity and affliction—in an hour of temptation—and finally, under the apprehensions of death.

I. One special season when we shall find it of great advantage *to set the Lord before us*, is as often as Providence throws opportunities of doing good in our way. Perhaps there may be even a necessity of doing this sometimes. We may feel a disinclination to those good offices, which it is in the power of our hands to perform; and instead of welcoming the occasion as a favour of Providence, may be willing to find excuses for baulking it. When this is the case, we cannot do a better or wiser thing, than to revive the thoughts of God; for by this means we shall find it less difficult

ficult to conquer our reluctance, and shall become ashamed of excuses which will not stand the test. And possibly without taking this method, we shall find covetousness or some other bad disposition too hard for us. Have I an opportunity of being useful to the world or to the church, to the publick or to some private person, by acts of liberality, charity, piety, or the like, and shall I suffer them to escape me? This is not the return which I owe to God for his goodness to me. 'Tis far from grateful, for I thought thus to reason, that as my goodness extendeth not to God himself, I ought the rather to extend it *to the saints that are in the earth; and to the excellent in whom is his delight.* Nay, it is not just to God, who hath not given me wealth, or power, or any other talent, to make no use of it, or what use I please; but to employ it in the way which his Providence points to me. If my very being is not my own, as certainly it is not, much less is any thing else that I possess mine. And therefore when I take upon me to lay it up, or expend it, without the leave and direction of the supreme proprietor, I presume to exercise an absolute right over what is another's; for *the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein.*

Psal. xvi.
2, 3.

Psal.
xxiv. 1.

And

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Heb.
xiii. 16.

And besides the injustice to God the supreme Lord, in such a conduct, there is a defect of justice as well as of kindness and charity towards my fellow-creatures, who as often as they have occasion for my help, and it is in my power to assist them, have a claim to be relieved by me; being the persons appointed by God to receive such a part of the good which he hath deposited in my hands, and I can very well spare. Let us think of this when opportunities of benefiting others present themselves to us, for it is not by chance. God himself calls upon us, not to bury or napkin up the talents which he hath committed to our trust. If we reflect upon this, we shall not *forget to do good and communicate*; especially when we farther consider, that *with such sacrifices God is well pleased*.

2. When we meet with difficulty, opposition, and reproach, or any other discouragements, in pursuing the dictates of our consciences, this also will be a very *proper time to set God before us*. It is no uncommon thing to be opposed in that, wherein we might justly expect the countenance and concurrence of every friend to virtue and religion, and to be blamed and hardly used for what is highly worthy of praise. For what is more to a person's praise, what a better argument of a truly great and honest mind, than endeavouring to

to have a right notion of his duty, and then stedfastly adhering to it, without regarding the favour or displeasure of men? Never betraying a good cause through unmanly fear or vicious shame, nor sacrificing truth to fleshly wisdom, and sincerity and religion, to the reputation of them? And one would think, when a person acts so brave a part, he should at least have all good men like himself on his side; and yet it is not always so. The world are unjust to such a person from ill will to virtue and religion; and good men too often through mistake, or the unperceived influence of passion, prejudice, and party. And how shall the christian keep his ground in such a circumstance, without in the least deserting his duty, but by presenting God to his view, as a constant witness to his integrity, and the certain rewarder of it? There is enough in this thought, to make him despise all the undeserved reproach and ill treatment that he may encounter. What though he not only *labours in vain, and spends his strength for nought*, but is requited with censure and ill will, where he deserved praise and thanks; if he can say as the Prophet, *surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward with my God*, he hath abundant reason to be satisfied, and to hold out in a cause which must triumph at last.

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Isa. xlix.

4.

But

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But then we are not to forget, that it must be really conscience, not humour and stiffness from which we act; and that we must have taken care to inform our consciences in the best manner we are able; otherwise whatever we suffer in maintaining the part we have espoused, it cannot be ascribed to a rational and religious conscience, and therefore has little virtuous or praise-worthy attending it.

3. In the discharge of any particular office or trust, the good management of which requires great integrity, it will be exceeding useful to *set the Lord before us*. Our great Master hath given these two marks of a good steward, that he is wise and faithful. *Who is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household?* Faithfulness is an essential qualification of such a person, which made the Apostle say, *it is required in stewards*, as a quality which cannot be dispensed with, *that a man be found faithful*. Wisdom or prudence is highly expedient, but fidelity is absolutely necessary. And the same may be applied to other trusts. Whoever undertakes them is concerned to acquit himself in such a manner, as he would expect from another intrusted by or for him; that no occasion may be given for reproaching him as deficient in care or conscience. And this is the more necessary.

Luke xii.
42.

I Cor.
iv. 2.

fary, as so much depends upon giving a good example herein, not only with respect to a man's own credit, but that of religion. The Prophet *Samuel*, after having long had the affairs of the *Israelites* under his direction, could stand forth before the assembled people, and say like a man of unspotted honesty, *Behold, here I am, witness against me before the Lord. Whose ox have I taken, or whose ass? Whom have I defrauded, whom have I oppressed, or of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?* Thus should every one in any place of trust, whether higher or lower, in the state or in a private family, in worldly or spiritual affairs, for one person or more, be able to challenge the strictest scrutiny into their conduct, making it their study to preserve clean hands, and a pure conscience, and to be as useful in their station as possible.

1 Sam.
xii. 3.

And that a man may answer this character, he cannot do better than to have the fear of God before his eyes, and frequently to think how he may hope for his approbation. For if this be what he seeks, and he does not so much dread being detected by men, in doing any thing which is an abuse of his trust, as incurring the displeasure of God, this latter motive will work much more constantly and effectually than the other. For 'tis possible if we do not act right,

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right, we may escape discovery from men ;
whereas from the eye, or justice, or power
of God, we can never withdraw ourselves.

4. It will be a very proper time to *set
the Lord before us*, when we are taking any
important step in life. But this with some
other instances, and the encouragement to
practise the duty in all, must be reserved
for the next Discourse.

S E R-



S E R M O N X I X .

Instances of Conduct wherein we
should peculiarly regard G O D,
and the Blessing promised to those
who do it.



P S A L M xvi. 8.

*I have set the Lord always before me ; be-
cause he is at my right-hand, I shall not
be moved.*



O assist you in improving these words, S E R M O N
X I X .

I. I have enumerated the
principal pious acts and dispo-
sitions supposed in those *who set the Lord
always before them.*

II. Mentioned the several relations, in
which it will be useful to represent God to
ourselves

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ourselves, in the course of our lives. I have also in part,

III. Instanced the special seasons, when our thus regarding God will be of peculiar service. I considered three, when we have opportunities of doing good thrown in our way by Providence—when we meet with ill treatment, in pursuing the dictates of our consciences—and when called to discharge some important office or trust. I proceed to mention a

4th. When we are taking any important step in life, it will then be of great service *to set the Lord before us.* If in all our ways we are to acknowledge God, imploring his direction and blessing, being willing to do nothing without these, much more are we to observe this method in designs and resolutions of more than usual consequence. By a constant regard to Providence, we are to own the interest which it has in all our affairs; but as those which are of the greatest moment, and like to draw very considerable effects after them, may be supposed under a peculiar guidance of heaven; we should be alike wanting to ourselves and in the respect we owe to God, if we do not implore his special direction in them. It is never in our power to secure the issue we please, the whole is subject to the divine determination, and may take a turn we little thought of. If we forget God,

'tis

'tis much if the affair in the end turn out SERMON
XIX. to our satisfaction ; we shall be very likely to meet with a disappointment in one respect or other ; in being hindred from our purpose, or which is worst obtaining the thing we aim'd at, but not the advantage and happiness we expected in it. Whereas when we ask counsel of God, careful always to behave as his humble supplicants and faithful servants, we are sure of a prosperous issue, in one sense or other ; as to ourselves at least, and the share we personally have in the undertaking, the blessing of the most high shall attend us, and the event be that which is most for our final benefit. *Ezra* being on his return from *Babylon* to *Jerusalem*, proclaimed a Fast, that they might afflict themselves before God, to seek of him a right way for themselves, and for their little ones, and for all their substance. And if we do not seek to God to guide us in the right way, 'tis much if we find it, or continue long in it. Ezra viii. 21.

5. In a time of adversity and affliction, this duty of *setting the Lord before us*, is more especially in season ; answering a double end, the correcting those sins and errors which may have brought our affliction upon us, or at least of which it is the design of every affliction to put us in mind ; and to prevent our running into those errors, to which we are incident in an afflicted condition.

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Isaiah
xlv. 7.

Heb. xii.
10.

tion. If we have a right notion of the divine Providence, we cannot think that any of the troubles and calamities of life are mere casual things. They who have cast off the fear of the Almighty, may indeed say, when they meet with any evil occurrence, that it is their bad fortune, a part of their destiny. As if the difference between one man's condition and another's, or the diversity in the life of the same man, proceeded altogether from a blind accidental shuffling of events. But all who have a principle of rational piety entertain other and truer notions of things. *They know the Lord who exerciseth loving-kindness and judgment in the earth; and believe that he forms the light and creates darkness, that he makes peace and creates evil, that he the Lord doth all these things.* And to what end does he appoint distress for men, and bring darkness upon them? *It is not for his own pleasure, as if he delighted in the misery of his creatures, but for their profit, and that they may be made partakers of his holiness.*

Adversity is a time for men to consider; to consider what they have done, and what they are to do, what duty they have either wholly omitted, or been too deficient in it, or what sins they have indulged; resolving at the same time to be more watchful and constant for the future in avoiding evil, and per-

performing what is good. What are the duties peculiarly belonging to an afflicted state, these also they are to consider. Should they not heartily endeavour to have their wills entirely resigned to the will of God? To have a grateful sense of the mercies of God to them, and the gracious intentions of all his dispensation, that they may be able to bless God in the most dark and afflicted condition? To love the world less, and God more, and to become more indifferent to all the enjoyments of life, and even to life itself, from which every affliction is intended to wean us? Is it not thus that we ought to *set the Lord before us*, in a time of affliction; wisely practising all the duties which such a season demands? By these means, affliction itself will become only a less pleasant way to that perfect happiness, which is the end of our beings, and the aim of all our desires; and not losing our patience in the several trials of life, we shall be great gainers by them.

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6. An hour of temptation is another special season, wherein it will prove of great advantage to *set the Lord before us*. Are we strongly tempted to any sin, and in danger of being overcome? Let us call in the thoughts of God to our aid. This method *Joseph* took when his chastity was strongly assaulted, and in it he found his

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Gen.
xxxix. 9.

safety. *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* So let us reason and expostulate with ourselves, when we observe our hearts leaning to the enemies side. Is not the action, which I am persuaded or inclined to do, strictly forbidden by God? Will it not offend him, and that justly? And how then can I once entertain the thought of doing it, how parley with the temptation but for a moment, when if I do it, *I shall sin against God?* That God whose authority to lay upon me what commands he pleases, is unquestionable; and whose goodness is no less conspicuous in his laws, than his authority—That God who hath enforced his laws with the promise of an infinite and everlasting reward to the obedient, and with the threatening of everlasting destruction to all wilful and impenitent transgressors—That God whose Omnipresence renders it impossible to sin and not to be known, whose perfect holiness and inflexible righteousness, leave no hope of impunity to incorrigible offenders; as his almighty power renders it vain to think of escaping or resisting. Shall I venture to offend against this God, to abuse such goodness, and to defy such power? And for what? For something that can make me amends for the loss of his favour? Alas, no; for gratifying a brutal lust, pleasing an idle companion, or for a little

little worldly honour, or power, or gain. SERMON XIX.
And what are these, that I should venture
so much for them? They are by no means
equal in value to that peace and tranquility
of mind, which I sacrifice for them at
present; much less to the love of God, and
all the glorious effects of it, which I run
the hazard of losing for ever.

Would persons allow themselves time for
such reflections as these, all the baits of sin,
all its specious promises and flattering al-
lurements would signify nothing. Nor
would they any more regard the discourage-
ments and terrors, with which the agents
of Satan are wont to represent the ways of
religion as surrounded, in order to frighten
men from them. It is because such thoughts
seldom come into their minds, or are not
retained there, that so many are overcome
by temptations. They may call their temp-
tations invincible if they please, the better
to excuse themselves, but before this plea
will prove of any service, they must be able
to give a reason for neglecting their best
defence. Let temptations be very strong,
that will not justify a compliance. The
known strength of the temptation sets their
sin and folly in a clearer light; who did
not turn their thoughts to God, and im-
plore the aids of his grace, and heartily
concur with them; which if they did they
would find, that no temptation had befallen

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1. Cor.
x. 13.

them, but was *common to man*, and what good men had frequently vanquished, and without a great deal of difficulty.

Let me add one particular more.

7. Under the apprehensions of death is a very proper time to *set the Lord before us*. It is indeed natural for those who have lived without God to fly to him for succour, when they come to die. When they see that no one else can help them, then however unwillingly they think of God, and implore that mercy, which till now they have neglected. Nay, perhaps they do more than implore it, they confidently rely upon it, deceived by false notions of the divine mercy, or of themselves; or of the doctrines of the gospel, and the terms of salvation. But these are not the persons, to whom I am now speaking. These I leave to the mercy of God, with this caution, that there cannot be a more dangerous experiment, than that of a death-bed repentance; to which therefore no wise man will trust in an affair of everlasting consequence.

The persons I have now in view are such, as *have set the Lord before them* in the course of their lives, *walking before him in truth, and with a perfect heart*. And for persons of this character to *set the Lord before them*, when death approaches, is to take care that they finish well, and die as they have

have lived to the glory of his name. This is agreeable to the description given of the genuine disciples of Christ, by his apostle Paul. *Whether we live, we live to the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether therefore we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

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Rom. xiv.
8.

“ *My times, O Lord, are in thy hands, as*
“ *the time of my birth, so the time of my*
“ *death; and if that be now come, I hum-*
“ *bly submit. The strength of my hope and*
“ *my refuge is in God; in his mercy and*
“ *faithfulness, which have been my great*
“ *support hitherto, and my song in the house*
“ *of my pilgrimage. This is my sanctuary*
“ *from the fear of death, even thy cove-*
“ *nant mercy, O Lord, and the example of*
“ *thy well-beloved Son. In imitation of*
“ *whom I would say, (not forgetting the*
“ *distance between the master and the dis-*
“ *ciple, and the great difference in the*
“ *meaning of the words, when applied to*
“ *the one and the other,) therefore my heart*
“ *is glad, and my glory, that is, my soul,*
“ *which is my noblest part, and my tongue*
“ *as its interpreter, rejoiceth. My flesh*
“ *also shall rest in hope of a glorious and*
“ *happy resurrection. For thou wilt not*
“ *leave my soul, or my life, in Hades. Thou*
“ *wilt shew me the path of life. In thy*
“ *presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand*
“ *are pleasures for ever more.*”

Psal. xvi.

9.

Nature
fails,

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fails, but O let not my heart and my faith fail too ! Methinks I would not do any thing to disgrace the good cause which I have espoused ; and therefore not only for my own sake, but for the sake of that, I would let all who are about me see, that I *have hope in my death*, and bear my dying testimony to the wisdom of religion ; that the righteous may hear thereof and be glad, and be less moved at the thoughts of their own dissolution ; and that others may be prevailed with to chuse the way of virtue and piety, seeing the end of it to be peace.

Good persons should reckon it their duty to behave, in the very best manner they are able at the conclusion of their days ; with an intire resignation, an undisturbed calmness, and a christian fortitude. And for this end they should summon up all the force and resolution of their own minds, as well as implore aid and consolation from above. And the best preparation to all this, is a life, not good in the main only, but eminently so ; a regular, even course of piety and goodness, in every part of which the influence of the doctrines, precepts and promises of the gospel is visible. We no more wonder to see such a life conclude in an agreeable manner, than after a bright summer's day, to find the evening calm, and to behold the sun setting without one dark cloud. This concludes the third General

neral, under which I proposed to instance SERMON
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some special seasons, wherein, *setting the
Lord before us*, will prove of great advantage. It remains,

IV. That I show you the happy effects of this method. *Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* The Lord being *at our right hand* signifies, that he is near to us when we call upon him, ready to hear our prayers, to answer our trust, and to reward our piety and obedience. We represent him *at our right hand* by *faith*, and accordingly he takes that place. He is indeed on our right hand and on our left, and encompasses us every way, so that no evil can come nigh us without his leave; but as the right hand is generally endowed with the greatest strength and activity, and is therefore made the emblem of these things, the powerful protection of the most high, and the ready assistance which he extends to all who fear him, are therefore described by this expression of his *being at their right hand*. He is not a God afar off, like the vanities of the heathen, those false deities, to which they foolishly pay divine honours, senseless and impotent, alike ignorant of the wants of their votaries, or unable to supply them; or those earthly helps and sanctuaries, to which they who formally worship none but the true God, often betake themselves. Vain are our expectations

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pectations from these things; at best they can do but little for us, and without the leave of God nothing at all. In trouble we call and there is none to answer. Where then are those persons or things which we made our trust? They are either false, and wilfully deceive our expectations; or weak and ignorant, and do it necessarily. Whereas the pious man's refuge is ever nigh, his fortress is impregnable, his rock never to be shaken, he is a present help in every time of need.

The privilege of all who have *the Lord at their right hand*, that is, of all who *set him before them*, is that *they shall not be moved*. He hath promised, that he will *never suffer the righteous to be moved*, that he will not suffer *their feet to be moved*; which we are not so to understand, as if good men were exempted from the common frailties and weaknesses of human nature, or insensible of the changes incident to their mortal condition. The best men are but men, and to be a man is to be a frail, indigent, and mutable creature. These ideas are always annexed to that name. But though this be their character as men, it is their happiness as good men, that they find a relief for their own weakness, and poverty, and mutability, in the all-sufficient power and immutable faithfulness of God. He hath commanded them *to*
trust

trust in him with all their hearts, and not to lean to their own understandings; in all their ways to acknowledge him, and then assured them, that he will direct their paths. If they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will add to them food and raiment. For the Lord God will be a sun and a shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. What can rationally move his mind who believes these and the like promises of scripture? What really move him out of possession of true good, who is interested in them? Surely the person who firmly believes a particular Providence, lives under the belief of it, and is favoured by it, cannot be moved.

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Prov. iii.

5.

Matt. vi.

33.

Pfalm

lxxxiv.

11.

Yet some serious and pious persons are prevented from enjoying this settled satisfaction, by the following objection, which shakes their faith in a particular Providence. This therefore, I would first remove out of their way, before I further insist on the blessings promised to them, who *set the Lord always before them.*

And against the encouraging doctrine of a particular Providence, this objection has been urged. "That it appears to be most
" worthy the greatness and wisdom of God,
" to govern the moral world, as he does the
" natural, by fixed general laws; and that

" his

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“ his interposing so frequently in favour of
“ the pious and good, as this doctrine sup-
“ poses, would be to violate continually the
“ general and wisely established order of
“ his government.”

But to this we answer, that this objection is founded wholly on mistake ; since a particular moral Providence may be exerted according to fixed general laws, correspondent to the varying tempers and characters of moral agents. The general law, according to which we affirm, that God exercises a particular Providence, is no other than this—His steady determination so to influence human minds for aiding their virtue and piety, and favourably directing their conduct, as he sees to be best adapted to answer the great end of his moral government, the improvement and happiness of his rational creatures ; and to effect this in a manner consistent with their freedom of choice, and with the common nature and characters which he hath assigned them. As a consequence of this original and general determination, in all cases wherein persons by their integrity, their need of a peculiar influence and direction, and their humble application to God, are qualified to be thus favoured, it is an invariable rule of the divine government thus to favour them. We experience it to be a standing law of what is called God’s natural Providence,

dence, that a person who when the Sun shines will make a proper use of his eyes, shall perceive and avoid a river or precipice; while the man who will walk with his eyes shut shall stumble, and fall and perish. And it is as general and wisely established a law of his moral Providence, that whenever the sincerely pious, after an honest use of their natural powers and other advantages, are still in want of his favourable influences on their minds, or on the minds of others, in order to their attaining what upon the whole would be good for them, or declining what would prove evil; that God will either immediately, or by his holy Spirit or Angels, kindly influence the human mind for these purposes.

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That ideas now rise to the view of our minds under a divine direction, conformably to laws established by the great Father of spirits; and that our continuing rational creatures, and making improvements in knowledge depend upon his stated influences, is evident to those who closely reflect upon what passes within them. Nor can memory be rationally accounted for, without the supposition of such influences. And why should it be thought any more unworthy of God as a moral Governor, to influence according to settled laws the minds of men, considered as moral

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ral agents, and with a view to their improvement in goodness and happiness?

To the proofs and instances of this particular Providence, with which the Scriptures abound, a few of which have been mentioned, let me add this argument in confirmation of the doctrine. That otherwise God would not treat men as being what they really are, changeable creatures, at different times requiring and deserving different treatment; and frail and ignorant creatures, exposed to evils and temptations which they cannot foresee or turn aside, and therefore wanting a superior conduct. A wise governor will treat his subjects as being what they are; and to establish and pursue rules of government irrespective of their conduct, and unsuitable to their cases, would be treating them as what they are not, and to abide by such rules would be an arbitrary obstinacy, not the constancy of wisdom. How many instances might be named, wherein mere imprudence, or occasional inattention, would produce lasting ill consequences to persons of real virtue and piety, render them in a manner useless to the world, and deprive them of the present satisfactions and future rewards of extensive usefulness. And does it not appear worthy the wise goodness of an ever present God, by his influence on the mind to prevent this? Especially as it may be done

done without infringing human liberty, the will being determined purely by the light thus infused into the understanding; and without giving any occasion for regarding mere enthusiastick impulses, since after all we are to conduct ourselves by the general rules of wisdom, virtue, and piety, and are only assisted to understand, recollect, or apply these.

Let it also be considered, that no case can be mentioned relating to particular persons, wherein they might want or pray for some real good, or to be delivered from what would prove evil; in which God may not effectually answer their prayers, by exciting proper thoughts either in the persons themselves, or in others. And if you except the national blessings and calamities of healthful and fertile, or sickly and barren seasons, every other good or evil suited to a probationary state may be thus dispensed by God, either in answer to prayer, and as a reward to piety and integrity; or or as a correction or punishment of irreligion and vice. Yea, the greatest temporal calamity, the Pestilence, may be brought on a Nation or kept off from it, solely by a proper influence on the minds of particular persons. And even the evils arising from barren seasons, may be in a great measure prevented by the same means, as we learn from the history of *Joseph*.

And

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XIX.

Psal.
xxxiv. 7.
Heb. i.
14.

And to close what reason offers in proof of a particular Providence, and to remove objections against it, let it be observed, that it is a known and fixed constitution of God's moral government, that men should be able to influence each other for good or hurt. And why may we not as rationally admit, what the Scriptures declare to be fact, that the *ministry of angels* is one part of the scheme of divine Providence? God may therefore in answer to our prayers and reward to piety, avert evil or confer good, as he sees to be proper for such beings as we are on our trial, by the ministry of angels, acting according to established, general laws. This would not be any more a violation of the general laws of his Providence, than when good men exert in obedience to his commands, the powers he hath given them, in doing good or preventing evil.

Having answered the principal objection against the doctrine of a particular Providence, that the mind of the pious and good may receive all the establishment and comfort which the promises of the holy Scriptures will abundantly supply; let us now distinctly consider the encouragement given in the text, to those who *set God always before them, they shall not be moved, because he is at their right hand*. This expression denotes their security in two respects, in
respect

we should peculiarly regard God.

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respect of their temporal interests and affairs, and in regard of their spiritual.

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1. In respect of this temporal life, and the affairs and concerns of it, they are upon a safe foundation. *They who trust in the Lord, says the Psalmist, shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.* A very strong and significant expression, and yet exactly true. Earthquakes have raised some hills and levelled others; but *mount Zion* being the favourite residence of the eternal King, while he had his dwelling there, was secured against all such destructive accidents, as was the temple which stood upon it, as long as God was faithfully worshiped there. And thus supported, comforted, and encompassed by the divine presence, the pious man can go out and come in, lie down and rise up, without being anxiously concerned for any of the accidents attending this mortal life. He may have enemies, whom he himself has not made so, but God being his almighty friend, he hath no cause to apprehend the effects of their most restless and inveterate malice against him. God can *make his enemies to be at peace with him*, or deprive them of their power, or cause that which they designed for evil to produce good. His body is subject to hurt, and pain, and weariness, to sickness and mortality, like the bodies of other men;

Psal.
CXXV. 1.

H h

and

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Psal.
lxxiii.

Acts xx.
24.

and while he is in the world, he is exposed to all the changes of it as other men are; but the soul that dwells in his body is strengthened and animated by other principles, and refreshed with other and nobler comforts than theirs. And not being of the world in the same sense that they are, he is not like them robed of his quiet, and rendered inconsolable by the most adverse and calamitous events of life, or by the prospect of death. God will be at his right hand when he conflicts with his last enemy; and having been *his guide unto death, will then be the strength of his heart and his portion for ever*. He is of a temper somewhat resembling that heroic one of the Apostle *Paul*, who when he knew that bonds and afflictions did await him, could yet say, *and none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy*. This is the main point with every true christian, and this being secured he can be easy about other matters. And such is his happiness that about this too, he hath no just ground to be troubled, as long as he proves faithful to himself. For

2. His being unmoved, by means of the presence of God with him, imports his security in respect of his spiritual condition, his *continuing in the faith grounded and settled; so as not to be moved away from the hope*

we should peculiarly regard God.

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hope of the Gospel; nor to fall from his stedfastness, for God is able to make him stand. He is faithful who hath promised, that he will not suffer those who love him to be tempted above what they are able to bear. He will strengthen and establish them, will keep them from falling, and preserve them by his mighty power, through faith, unto salvation. While the Lord is at their right hand, no power of the enemy can prevail over them. They can challenge principalities and powers, things present and things to come, life or death, or any other creature, to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the midst of dangers and temptations they are in some sense as safe and invulnerable, as if they were quite out of their reach; for while God is on their side nothing can finally hurt them. No wound they receive can be mortal; and God will not depart from them till they force him. Let them only keep close to him in the way of their duty, fear his threatenings and trust his promises, and in well doing depend upon his assistance, and he will never forsake them. They shall go from strength to strength, and instead of being shaken in mind by the assaults and temptations with which they meet, they shall be the more confirmed, and be better rooted and grounded in every virtue of the christian life. And thus shall they

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Rom.
viii. 28.

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continue till they pass into that happy state, where they and their condition shall be forever the same, unalterably holy and happy.

As an application of this subject, let me persuade you, my Friends, to imitate the Psalmist, *setting the Lord always before you*, as he did. It is certainly the wisest course we can take, the most compendious way to happiness of any in the world. Other ways may promise fair, but this alone leads us to the end at which we aim. For in this way, we have God himself for our guide; and while under his direction can never go astray. We are sure of being in the right road, and which is farther considerable, are secure from meeting any fatal accident. We shall want for nothing on the way, that is really convenient for us; and suffer nothing but what will turn out to our great advantage in the end. And how pleasant will it be to travel through life in such company? To think that God is ever present with us; the very thought will help to banish all fear from our minds, and create light in the midst of darkness. The afflictions of life will appear light and momentary, we shall have double pleasure in the discharge of our duty, and being habitually religious shall be constantly cheerful.

Let us therefore resolve to make religion our business, and to manage all our other

affairs under the influence of it. Where-
ever we are, in whatever company or busi-
ness engaged, still let us call to mind that
God is with us; and that he will be with us
in a way of mercy, if *we walk before him
in all his commandments blameless*. The
most common reason of those interruptions,
of which christians complain, in the com-
forts and supports of religion, is to be found
in the inequality of their conduct. They
are not so uniformly pious and good as they
ought to be; they are too prone to slide
into a sensual and worldly temper, in which
they too seldom entertain the thoughts of
God; and when they do, have not that
pleasure in them, which they used to give.
Let them more constantly set the Lord be-
fore them, and they will find him at their
right hand, so that they shall not be greatly
moved, whatever changes they pass through,
or temptations they encounter; their peace
will be more sure, and their comforts not
so liable to fail.

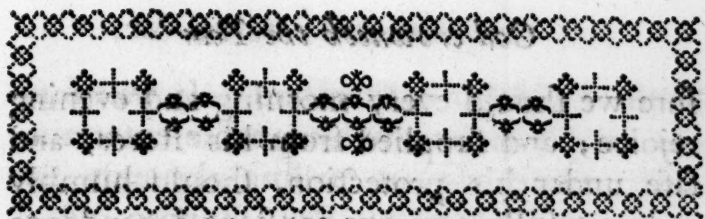
Let us then, my Friends, considering
these things, begin and end every day with
God in secret fervent devotion, prayer, and
praise, and live *all the day long in his fear*.
Let a prevailing regard to God, his glory,
his authority, and his laws, restrain us
from all evil, and powerfully excite us to
practise every thing that is good. Let re-
ligion be the guide of our lives, and it will

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be the happiness of them too! It will supply us with the most agreeable entertainment while we are passing through the world, and with the best supports when we are leaving it; filling us with an humble confidence in our last hours, and brightening the shadows of death with the hopes of soon seeing and enjoying God in perfection, and receiving from his goodness the reward of a blessed and glorious immortality.

May a life of habitual piety prepare us all for such a death, and may we all, by such a death, recommend religion and glorify God. Amen.

SER-



S E R M O N XX.

God crowneth the Year with his
Goodness.



PSALM lxxv. II.

Thou crownest the Year with thy Goodness.*

NO disposition is more reasonable, SERMON
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than constant gratitude to a great
and constant Benefactor. We
depend upon God continually for
life and breath and all things, and taste
his bounty in every enjoyment; our hearts
therefore should be possest, and our conduct
animated, by an habitual gratitude to him.
He *maketh the outgoings of the morning and*
evening to rejoice; in his goodness there- Ver. 8.

* For the Benefit of the Charity School, Gravel Lane,
Southwark, January 1, 1760.

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fore we should every morning and evening rejoice; and supplied from his stores, and safe under his protection, should humbly and gratefully own our constant dependence and increasing obligations. Besides these daily acknowledgements, it will also be useful for warming our gratitude, and raising our apprehensions of the divine benevolence, to review, at some distant periods, the divine conduct towards us. The present season is highly proper for such an employment, when under the care of his kind Providence, we have happily concluded another Year, and are entering a new one. The divine favours which we have received the past Year, when viewed together, will by their number and value more strongly affect us; and this length of time will enable us to judge with more certainty of some of the divine designs, which in their influence and execution reached a considerable way.

We shall not judge much amiss, if we regard the *Psalms* before us, as a kind of *New-Year's Ode*; the Jews beginning their civil Year in *Autumn*. In it the devout King celebrates both the stated and extraordinary Providence of God, and the most signal instances of his goodness. I would improve the text for your assistance in a like employment, recollecting and warmly acknowledging the divine favours which
have

have crowned another Year. May a sense of our great obligations so powerfully excite us to please God for the future, that he may fill the following Year yet more abundantly with his benefits, and crown all the blessings of the present life with the compleat and everlasting felicities of the heavenly state.

The phrase, *Thou crownest the Year with thy Goodness*, denotes the adorning and enriching it; a crown both enriching and adorning the wearer. Thus we say a plentiful crop crowns the fields, rendering them rich and beautiful; and thus the goodness of God *crowns the Year*, as the beauties and riches of the several seasons, and whatever contributes to the support and pleasure of life, are the productions of his almighty energy and unfailing benevolence.

In treating this pious confession of *David*;

I. I would show you, that it is God *who crowneth the Year with good*; and that we really owe all the blessings of it to him, as their immediate or remote author.

II. Assist you in observing some of the principal instances of the divine goodness, which have *crowned another Year*.

And then add some proper Reflections.

I. I would briefly prove, that it is God *who crowneth the Year with good*, and that we really owe all the blessings of it to him,

as

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as their immediate or remote author. That you may discern this truth in full evidence, be pleased to consider attentively the following Observations.

1. As in the begining the inanimate creation derived all its beauty, movements, and utility, from God's alwise and almighty energy, so for the continuance of these it is intirely dependent upon him. The matter which composes the sun, the air, the earth, and the water, is in itself void of knowledge, power, or motion, being absolutely dead and thoughtless. It is therefore ignorant of the beauteous and useful forms which it wears, of the regular motions it performs, and of the wise and beneficial effects which it is instrumental in producing. The wisdom and power of the Almighty therefore were required, to collect and form in the heavens that huge mass of fire called the Sun, and to place it properly for enlightening, warming, and fertilizing attendant worlds; and the same wisdom and power alone can turn round its great body, dart its beams, and by them enlighten and warm innumerable creatures. The sun-beams are evidently incapable of darting themselves, and know nothing of the light and comfort which they administer. And God is as truly, and more entirely, the author of the blessings we receive from the Sun's heat and light, as a person

person who should bring us light and fuel, and make a fire in a cold and dark night, would be of the relief and pleasure we received. Thus the Sun *declares the glory of God*, his almighty power and unerring wisdom, which impel and guide it; *whose going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it, so that nothing is hidden from his heat.* Do not light and life and pleasure, and all the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth, depend upon the Sun's influences; and would they not all fail if these were with-held? And is not God then the author of all the good produced by the Sun; who turns round his vast body, and darts his beams, which would otherwise have neither light nor motion?

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Psal. xix.
1.

To the wisdom of the Almighty we must ascribe it, that the surface of the earth was at first covered with proper materials, for the growth and nourishment of the countless plants and trees, which spring out of it, and furnished with seeds of all kinds to rise and grow through all generations. And what cause, but the wise direction of the same God, unfolds the several seeds at their proper times, and guides through their fine channels the materials for their growth? Do not also the successions of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, depend upon the regular motions

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motions of the Earth or Sun? And does not the great Being, who moves and guides these, *crown the Year with his Goodness*; and does not the Psalmist with reason say unto God, *thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice?*

Are not the flowing of Rivers, and the rise and fall of Vapours, necessary to the fertility of the earth, and to the support of its inhabitants? And what cause but the power of God, continually raises the springs to the mountains tops, from whence they flow down to refresh and enrich the lands below them? What but his almighty energy, who makes the Sun his instrument, raises from the seas and other waters, vapours which float in the thin air, and fall at proper seasons? When we ascribe all this to nature, we use a word without a meaning; or else assign that as the cause, which is the effect itself. If we say such is the nature or constitution of the world, that these effects are produced regularly and constantly, we then mention a very great and constant effect, which requires a divine wisdom, power, and benevolence; namely, the framing so great and exact an engine as the natural world, and continually moving and working it, in a most regular and beneficial manner. The pious and philosophic King, with a just gratitude, ascribes all these effects to God. *Who visiteth the earth and watereth*

watereth it, who greatly enricheth it by the clouds and rivers which are full of water, and who prepareth us corn when he hath thus provided for its growth.

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If God then be the immediate author of the light and heat of the Sun, and of the regular successions of the seasons, and of day and night; if he cause the earth to yield continually herbs and grass for cattle, and corn and wine and oil for men, it is then most evident, that God crowneth the Year with his goodness; since he produceth all that variety and quantity of good we have enjoyed through the Year. Fire, earth, and water, which are destitute of all knowledge and power of motion, could no more produce these without his energy and direction, than the pencil, oil, and colours of the painter, could form an exact and beautiful landscape, without his directing skill, and eye, and hand.

2. The continuing inferior orders of living creatures, so necessary for the support and pleasure of human life, which must be ascribed to the wisdom and power of the almighty Creator continually exerted, is another demonstration that he *crowneth the Year with his Goodness*. Let us only take notice of the horses, bullocks, and sheep, and how much they contribute to the maintenance and delight of mankind, and then reflect on the manifest goodness of God in
pro-

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producing and preserving them. The frame of every one of these discovers infinitely more skill employed in forming it, than the best contrived and finished pieces of human art. The beasts ignorant of their own make, and of the make of their young, can have no claim to the honour of producing these. And the God who alone can form, and continually introduces them into life, and whose earth supports them, must be confest the author of all the good which mankind derive from them. His wisdom also is visible in regulating their increase, proportioning their males and females, and suffering none of these useful kinds to fail; but multiplying continually around us, beauty, life, and good, in infinite variety. When therefore we enjoy the benefits arising from the ministry of these creatures, as we have done the past Year, ought we not to observe and acknowledge the wisdom, power, and bounty of God? He is the author and preserver of the life, strength, and swiftness of the horse. He continually produces and feeds the sheep, by whose fleeces we are warmed, and nourished by their flesh. He gives to the ox his strength and patience of labour, and to the cow her treasures of milk; he also is the author of the life, beauty and music of the birds, and of the sagacity and industry of the bee.

A charitable person who with his own hands made bread for the hungry poor, and continually gave it to them, is not half so much the author of the relief which they receive, as God is of all the benefit we receive from the animal creation, continually formed and maintained by him, in subservience to our support, use, and pleasure.

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O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all, the earth is full of thy riches; so is the great and wide sea, wherein are creatures innumerable both small and great! All these wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thy hand, they are satisfied with good. Thou takest away their breath, and they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit and they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth.

Pfalm civ.

24.

3. As we owe our existence, and all our intelligent and active powers to God, and depend intirely upon him for their continuance, we are of consequence indebted to God for all the blessings which by these we procure. That God is the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits, and that we are as fearfully and wonderfully preserved by him, as made, will be evident to every one, who with attention considers the make either of our bodies or minds. What cause but the alwise and almighty

Pfalm
cxxxix.
Heb. xii.

Jehovah

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Jehovah could create an intelligent and free spirit, yea countless numbers of them, bearing the image of the deity? And does not the structure of our bodies, whose most inconsiderable parts in their contrivance and uses, are greatly superior to the most finished productions of human art, prove the boundless wisdom, power, and benevolence of our Maker? The continuance also of our reason and health, the regular rise and return of our ideas, of the nature of which, and the places where they are repositied, we are ignorant; and the maintaining the regular action of so nice and complicated an engine as the human body, demonstrate to every judicious observer, the continued energy and direction of the Creator.

If then we are indebted to God for understanding, judgment, memory, and for our active powers, for our limbs and senses, and for all our strength and sagacity, it is also evident, that whatever blessings we acquire, by means of these, are ultimately to be ascribed to God; who gave us these abilities. The pleasures and advantages we gain by the eye, we owe to him whose wisdom formed it. For the satisfactions of knowledge and goodness we are obliged to the Father of our spirits, who made them intelligent and free. The fruits of our skill and industry make us debtors to his

his goodness, who not only gave us our materials, but gave and preserves the abilities of improving them. As in God we SERMON
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Acts xvii.
live, and move, and have our being, and he also hath formed our peculiar geniuses, by which we gain peculiar advantages, should we not be stupidly ungrateful, if like *Nebuchadnezzar*, we ascribed all our acquisitions to ourselves, forgetting the God who ruleth in heaven and earth, and giveth unto us all things?

A slight accident which brings on a fever, shows our wisdom and strength not to be properly our own, depriving us in a few hours of both; and ought you not to be taught by this consideration, to ascribe the blessings of continued health, reason and vigor to God, who maintains the regular flow of your blood, the order of your minds, and activity of your members.

4. As God is also the Creator and Preserver of the rest of mankind, the author of their abilities and dispositions to contribute to our good, so by the blessings which we receive from others, *the Goodness of God crowneth the Year*. Are you happy in the prudence and tenderness of a Parent, in the discretion, sweetness and fidelity of a Husband or Wife, in the generous affection of a Friend or Brother, in the amiable qualities and dutiful behaviour of Children, in the modesty, diligence, and honesty of a Ser-

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vant, in the knowledge, virtue, and piety of a Minister, and the like? To the divine goodness you are principally indebted for all these blessings, since God formed them with those amiable qualities and benevolent dispositions, which improved by them yield so much satisfaction. It is true, there is a praise and affection due to them also, as they act with choice and kind intentions in doing us good; yet it is also true, that we owe the chief praise and gratitude to God, who formed their good qualities, and favoured them with such assistances and encouragements for improving their good dispositions. Who continuing also their lives, continues their subservience to our good. *Adam* was not more truly obliged to God for the pleasure of *Eve's* society, when his Maker formed her, and brought her to him, than we are to the divine goodness for all the blessings we receive from our fellow-creatures, to whom he gave all their useful qualities and benevolent dispositions. The Scriptures therefore with great justice, constantly use this language, that Children, Friends, and the like, are the gifts of God, and all the blessings they convey to us.

5. As we owe immediately to God our being born or placed in those circumstances, which occasioned our enjoying much of the good, that hath filled the past Year, on this account also we owe this praise to God, that he

he hath crowned the Year with his Goodness. Have you inherited from pious Parents an happy disposition and an healthful constitution, and received from them a good education and an easy fortune? To the goodness of God you are also obliged for these, who appointed your descent from such Parents, when he might have ordered it from Parents, of whom you would have received a sickly constitution, a bad education, and laborious poverty. All the blessings therefore consequent upon these, which have enriched many successive Years, particularly the last, make you debtors to his kind appointment. That you were born in a free and protestant nation, in peaceful times, and amidst the greatest advantages of the Gospel for rising to never-ending blessedness, you owe to the free Grace of God, who might have appointed your souls to animate bodies in *Turky, Spain, or Guinea*. All the blessings therefore of liberty, all the satisfactions of rational devotion, and all the peculiar improvements in virtue and piety, which have rendered the past Year happy to any of us, lay us under peculiar obligations to God; who not only sent his Son from heaven to instruct and save mankind, but directed our birth and education to be, where we might best enjoy the benefits of the christian salvation. Or hath a peculiar acquaintance, our being situated in such a family, engaged in

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such a friendship, and the like, contributed greatly to our satisfaction the last Year? And was this a consequence of our birth and education? It is evident we are here also indebted to the goodness of God, who thus cast our lot.

To conclude the general proof, as our most valuable satisfactions arise from a rational and warm devotion, from well-governed passions, conscious goodness, and a successful prosecution of immortal blessedness; and the divine goodness hath not only granted us by the Gospel great advantages for acquiring these, but by favourable influences on the mind, cherishes good affections, animates good resolutions, and assists us to practise our duty, to support trials and afflictions, overcome temptations, and improve in the divine life; as these attainments are therefore as truly Graces of God, as Virtues of our own, and the Scriptures assert the necessity and the communication of divine influences; and as a favourable conduct of divine Providence is often greatly assistant to our proficience in holiness and happiness—on these accounts with regard to the satisfactions of virtue and devotion which we have enjoyed the last Year, we have reason to say, that God *hath crowned the Year with his Goodness.*

These hints may suffice for explaining and proving the first General, that we owe

the blessings of the last Year to God as their immediate or remote author. Let me

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II. Assist you in observing some of the principal instances of that goodness, with which he hath *crowned another Year*.

1. The national blessings of success in Wars abroad, and at the same time of peace, liberty, and plenty at home, are considerable instances of that goodness, with which God *crowned the last Year*. While several protestant as well as popish countries, have suffered all the dreadful effects of War; want, famine, violence, slaughter, and desolation; and the wretched surviving inhabitants fear the continuance and increase of these evils; and many protestant states apprehend the utter subversion of their religion and liberties — We, though Principals in this War, have been strangers to all these evils. Our coasts have been free from insult, and our ships of trade have gone out to the most distant regions, and generally returned unplundered. And so great have been the successes with which almighty God hath blessed our fleets and armies, and the arms of our allies; that we have a fair prospect of soon reducing our enemies to accept a peace; which under the divine favour may long secure the liberties of *Europe*, the protestant interest, and the freedom and prosperity of our Country.

Hath our situation as an Island contributed greatly to secure us from the ravages of an invading enemy? And do we not owe this advantage to God, who caused the sea to flow between, and divide us from *France*? Have the wisdom of our Governors, the conduct and bravery of our Commanders, and the courage and vigour of our Soldiers and Sailors, the natural fruits of liberty and plenty, been among the causes of our security and success? And are not the wisdom, spirit, and abilities of our Governors and Commanders, and the strength and courage of our People, with the liberty and plenty which support them, the gifts of God? He also in his great goodness prolongs the life of our Sovereign, the Father of his People and Guardian of their liberties; whom his enemies, if he hath any left amongst us, cannot charge during his long reign with a single violation of our laws or privileges. All good subjects under his protection may serve God in that way, which they think most pleasing to their Maker, and most subservient to their improvement in virtue and piety, and to their everlasting happiness; and pursue their temporal interests by every honourable method, and securely enjoy the fruits of their honest industry.

How visible the divine favour also in the great plenty of the last Year, which not
only

only satisfies our own poor with bread, but the wants of our friends abroad ; while our increasing trade inables them to earn it, for their own support, and to the good of their Country. Did we feel somewhat of the evils which overwhelm our neighbours, particularly our protestant brethren in *Germany*, want, violence, slaughter, and desolation, we should then more justly estimate the divine goodness in our past security, and be more warmly grateful. To prevent our becoming insensible to such distinguishing kindness, and by ingratitude forfeiting it, let us often consider the wretched condition of other Nations, and then with a grateful rapture employ the praises, which *David's* piety indited, and which are so becoming our circumstances as God's favoured people. *Praise the Lord, O England, and bless thy God, Great Britain.* *He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates, and blessed thy children within thee. He hath covered thy heavens with clouds, and made the grass to grow abundantly on thy mountains. He hath covered thy vallies with corn, thy little hills rejoice on every side, and thy pastures are stored with flocks. He hath given peace in thy borders, and filled thee with the finest of the wheat. He continues to show thee his laws, and his exceeding great and precious promises. He hath not dealt thus with all nations, and as for his Gospel,*

I i 4 they

Psalms
cxlvii.

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they cannot read it. Praise ye the Lord!

As we are sharers in these national blessings, a consideration and grateful acknowledgement of them, should make a part of our review of the favours wherewith God *has crowned the Year.*

2. Hath God continued to many of you through the past Year, health, friends, and the conveniencies of life? He hath thus crowned it with his goodness. How necessary health, that we may relish life and its enjoyments in any degree. How delicate the frame of the human body, composed of ten thousand fine pipes and springs, which are so easily disordered, that it is wonderful the whole continues one day in order! How tender and watchful then the Providence of God, which hath preserved them in order so many days, and continued our ability to discharge the duties of life with pleasure, and enjoy its comforts with spirit! While the sicknesses of others have shown us, how frail our state, and how much we were indebted to the attentive goodness of our great Preserver. Have our nights been easy, our mornings sprightly, and our meals and labours chearful? Hath health qualified us to enjoy friends, company, books, and the various bounties of Providence, and rendered our devotions more animated? With the warmer gratitude let us own that mercy, which hath preserved our lives from sickness,

ness, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling, and crowned us with loving-kindness and benefits. SERMON
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God hath continued to us not only the faculties, but the objects of enjoyment. Death hath deprived others of dear Relations or Friends, while ours have been preserved. Violence, fraud, or accidents, have reduced many to poverty, who began the Year in plenty; whereas we have closed it as happily, perhaps more prosperously than we began it. Our Friends are as frail as theirs, who have yielded to death, our substance as subject to injustice or accidents as theirs; it is therefore the favour of God which hath distinguished us, and prospered the labour of our hands, and we should gratefully own it. If by our prudence, temperance, diligence, and integrity, we have contributed to the prolonging our prosperity; yet as our intellectual and active powers were the gifts of God, and our habits of virtue have been cherished by the instructions and encouragements of his Gospel, and the influences of his Grace, and his kind Providence secretly turns aside evils unseen by us, and disposes second causes to concur favourably; we ought with humility and gratitude to ascribe the continued possession of so many blessings to the great author of all good, as the principal cause.

3. That

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3. That we have been continued another Year in possession of peculiar advantages, for becoming established in holiness and happiness to eternity, we are greatly obliged to the divine goodness; and we have still greater reason to rejoice in it, if these advantages have been well improved. In proportion to the worth of the blessedness for which true religion prepares us, we are to estimate advantages for attaining it. Compleat and everlasting blessedness is of infinite worth, proportionably high should be our estimation of our religious advantages, and our gratitude to God for continuing them. Is the Deity represented to us in a light proper to kindle the noblest love, and form us to his resemblance in goodness and blessedness for ever? Are the fatal consequences of sin clearly set before us, and our duty in every part represented in a light distinct and engaging? Are the motives drawn from the love of God, and from the friendship and death of Christ, strongly urged upon our consciences; and the infinite recompences of the next state, so described and brought home to our minds, as to raise us above the temptations and afflictions of the present? Hath a merciful God through the last Year thus excited us, to regard in earnest our duty and happiness, and persuaded us to practise what would render us solidly happy in life,
and

and completely blessed in eternity? Had we during former Years trifled with the tenders of infinite blessedness, and continued insensible to the love of the Redeemer, indulging to mean passions and vices, with the hazard of heaven and immortality? And when God had exprest so affectionate a concern for our everlasting welfare, did we disregard it, and make him the returns of ingratitude and disobedience? Did God notwithstanding this, continue the calls of his Gospel and the methods of his Grace? How great this mercy to sinners, who had deserved to be deprived of advantages they abused, and of the life they wasted! How great would be the ingratitude and guilt of continuing this abuse! And how adorable the divine goodness, if at last he has prevailed, and if constrained by his mercies we have devoted ourselves to him, and deliberately entered upon that course, which certainly leads unto everlasting felicity!

Had some of you, my Friends, before entered these paths, and have the continued instructions and encouragements of the Gospel, forwarded you in them? Is your piety grown more warm and serious, your benevolence more active, and your joy in in God more sensible? Do the prospects of immortality brighten upon you, and does your interest in it improve? How great are
your

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your obligations to God, who though you also had been negligent, continued his concern for your improving piety and happiness; whose Gospel revealed those animating truths, and whose Providence placed you, where you might fully know them, and continued your capacities for improvement. If every advance in piety and virtue, will be rewarded with an advancing degree of glory and felicity everlasting, you can never be enough grateful to the Grace of God, who hath prolonged to you the advantages, which as Christians and Protestants you enjoy, for being now eminent in piety and holiness, and in perfection and blessedness to eternity.

Ecclef.
ix. 11.

4. Hath God increased to any the last Year the blessings of life, by prosperity in affairs, or by the accession of valuable Friends? With an increasing gratitude they should praise his goodness. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise; but time and chance happen to all.* That is, temporal prosperity does not solely depend on human strength, or skill, or industry; but on other causes apparently accidental, but really subject to the direction of divine Providence. A slip may cause the swiftest racer to fall and lose the prize; a sudden surprize or panic may occasion the defeat of the stronger by the weaker; a fire, shipwreck,
or

or unsuspected fraud may reduce the most prudent Trader to poverty, when inferior abilities, through a favourable concurrence of events, secure riches. Have you then been successful, have the seasons, the winds, or the seas, favoured you; have you escaped knaves that would have ruined your fortune, and have your correspondents forwarded your designs? You have reason to ascribe it to a favourable direction of God, whom the winds and seas obey, and in whose hand are the hearts of men, and who turneth them as he pleases; and as he hath increased your store, you should increase in acts of piety and charity.

Have any contracted happily new Relations? *A prudent Wife is from the Lord.* Have you satisfaction in an increasing Family, or increasing satisfaction in your Children? *The fruit of the womb is the gift of God,* and his blessing gives success to the pious endeavours of Parents. While therefore they rejoice in their success, they should bless the God who teacheth to profit. Have your honest endeavours to do good proved effectual? Have new and unexpected Friends arisen, whose friendship more than compensated undeserved ill treatment from others? We should bless God who hath formed men to approve piety, goodness, and integrity, and who hath set any good qualities of ours in a favourable light

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light before them; and should by this be more animated in our endeavours to do good, and more chearful and abundant in the service of God; *who when a man's ways please him, will make his enemies to be at peace with him*, or even render their ill-will subservient to his greater usefulness and happiness.

5. Have any been the last Year delivered out of some great danger; or have you been preserved even from the appearance of danger? You should in these instances acknowledge the divine goodness. Did a violent sickness threaten with a death, for which you was not well prepared, and did God hear your prayers and restore you? You should bless him, from whom the skill of the Physician, and the efficacy of Remedies are derived; and who placed you, where you might be benefited by them. Or hath your health been preserved from any sensible injury? How much greater your obligations to God, who continued the regular flow of your blood, and your vigour and activity. Did you fall, and did God remarkably preserve your bones, *so that not one was broken*? Or has the rage of a fire been restrained which threatened your substance? Or have you past the Year unalarmed by any? Hath God *given his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your journeys*, and the like? You ought with warm gratitude

gratitude to celebrate the goodness, which hath *kept your eyes from tears, and your feet from falling,* and hath covered you as with a shield. SERMON
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Creatures of so frail a make as we are, open to the surprize and assault of so many evils, so often deserving to be left a prey to them, or by our indiscretion exposing ourselves; if throughout a Year we have escaped any considerable hurt, did we rightly consider our case, could not fail of being warmly affected with the divine goodness; which keeps in order so delicate an engine, and preserves unhurt so tender a frame, by a kind and constant attention amidst a thousand accidents; an attention which our ingratitude and disobedience so frequently forfeit.

6. May we not also discern the divine goodness, even in the afflictions with which we have been visited the last Year? Were they not the necessary corrections of a wise and tender Parent, designed for our greatest good, and fitted to promote it? *And if light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* are they not instances of the divine goodness in appointing them? Have you been exercised with pain and sickness, and brought within view of the grave? Was not this discipline necessary to bring you to serious consideration, to a sense of

2 Cor.
iv. 17.

SERMON
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of your faults, and to a resolution of living more as strangers on earth, and as persons who have an infinite interest in another world, which would be utterly ruined by continued neglect, or vicious indulgence? Or have any been disappointed in their worldly projects and pursuits, and did not an excessive love to the world, and disregard to heaven, render it expedient for our heavenly Father thus to teach them, that their portion and happiness consisted not of these things; but that if they would become solidly happy in life, and compleatly blessed for ever, they must *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, and place their happiness more in approving themselves to God, and cultivating a pious, beneficent, and heavenly temper? Riches these, of which no accident can deprive us, and which will procure for us an everlasting inheritance.

Or hath life been embittered to any by the loss of a dear Friend or Relation? Was not your loss their gain? And if you made your grief an occasion of turning your thoughts more to that state upon which your Friends are entered, and are thus excited to greater diligence in preparing for the blessedness of heaven, might you not in the consciousness of this improvement, and in more assured hopes of the heavenly felicity, enjoy more present satisfaction, than their continued conversation could have

have given you? And when you partake in the distinguished and everlasting rewards of an improved piety, will you not find their death to have been also your gain?

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In short, as it is the general weakness of mankind, to incline to sensual pleasures and present advantages, and neglect the satisfactions of virtue and devotion, and the everlasting interests of an unseen state; and pain, sickness, and disappointment, have a natural influence to loosen us from a vain world, and direct our thoughts and affections to a more certain good, to the unmixed and compleat felicity of holiness and heaven; it must be every person's own fault, if what we call afflictions, losses, and disappointments, do not prove means of our enjoying valuable satisfactions at present, and gaining an eternal good. And if what sense and passion call evils, are in this view evident instances of the kind intention of God towards us, we ought thankfully to own, that *he doth not willingly grieve, or afflict the children of men*; who delighteth in showing mercy, and in conferring benefits, is the author of all our enjoyments, and *crowneth our Years with his Goodness.*

Lam.
iii. 33.

Leaving your thoughts to enlarge on these hints, and to apply them more particularly to your own cases; I would at-

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tempt your farther improvement by adding some practical Reflections.

1. How rational and happy his temper, who is habitually devout; and how irrational, ingrateful, and guilty, an irreligious temper and conduct! If an infinitely good God constantly surrounds us with his presence and favours, and is the author of all the good we enjoy, how reasonable is it, that we should seriously apprehend, and gratefully acknowledge his kindness and our obligations; should rejoice in the consideration of all surrounding benevolence, and raise the conduct of life by a concern to please and to be grateful to this God; who as he is infinitely beneficent, will grant peculiar instances of his favour to the grateful, and obedient, and benevolent. What employment of their minds more becoming intelligent creatures, than when the returning light recalls them to reason, action, and enjoyment, acknowledging with a warm gratitude the goodness which renews their intelligent and active powers, and darts the morning beams, the light of which would otherwise never visit them; and which continues the beauty and order of the creation, and all their agreeable circumstances relating to the present life, and their advantages for securing the blessedness of immortality? Can any employment be more becoming us, than begining every day

day with humble prayer and grateful praise to our constant Preserver and unwearied Benefactor? Or more delightful than to consider, that amidst the dangers and uncertainties of the Day, we are under the care of infinite goodness, and may depend upon it, for supplying us with whatever is proper to a state of trial, and guiding us to everlasting blessedness? Can they have known true pleasure, who have not known the pleasures of gratitude to God, and joy and confidence in him; and the cheering hopes of everlasting blessedness?

On the contrary, for beings whom God hath made intelligent, to rise every morning to life and action like the brutes, without any thought of the goodness which preserves them, or any gratitude to the bountiful God, who supplies every enjoyment, or any concern to please him, and answer the design of his benefits, how irrational, and how guilty! Do not such persons in effect deny, in contradiction to reason, truth, and their constant experience, that they are continually dependent and indebted to the divine goodness? And must not such ingratitude be highly displeasing to God, who beholds it; and change what would otherwise be blessings into a curse? Although an infinitely good God always surrounds such with his presence, waiting to train them for immortal felicity; it is

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the same to them as if there were no such Being; for they feel no emotions of grateful love, no joy in the consciousness of his presence, and no concern to comply with his designs, of making them happy for ever.

If God indeed *crown the Year with his Goodness*, and every enjoyment be his gift, how reasonable is it, that when we sit down to a Table, covered with his bounties, we gratefully acknowledge him, who makes the earth fruitful, and brings into life and maintains the various animals, by whose flesh our lives are supported; and giveth us *wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oyl which causeth his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth him*. If God be really the giver of all these things, what more reasonable, than to pay him the tribute of owning his bounty when about to partake of it? Would not this, if done with seriousness, improve the sensual pleasure, by the nobler pleasures of gratitude and hope in God, and determine us to enjoy his gifts with temperance and charity? And how stupid and ungrateful a creature is he, who daily sits down to his food, like the Ox or the Swine, and never cherishes a grateful thought of the bounty which ministers all that he enjoys?

At the close also of every Day, crowned with the divine favours, and at the conclusion

sion of the Year, what imployment more becoming rational creatures, than to reflect with wonder and gratitude on the goodness which preserved and supplied them, and on the returns they have made to it; then to implore the divine forgiveness of an unsuitable behaviour, resolve to act better, and then humbly commend themselves to the divine care for the future? We may forget the presence and goodness of God, and our obligations to him, but he is nevertheless present, nor are we ever the less obliged. We may thus deprive ourselves of the satisfactions of gratitude, admiration, and joy in God, and lose the happiness of an interest in his special favour, and after a life spent in forgetfulness of God, be for ever banished from his presence. This is all that unreasonable Irreligion can do for us. Let us therefore, my Friends, resolve, that our devotion and gratitude shall be constant, as the presence and goodness of our great Benefactor.

2. Does God *crown the Year with his Goodness*? Is he continually and infinitely communicative of good? Let us be excited to an imitation of his beneficence. If it be the glory and delight of God to do good extensively, it must be our honour and happiness to resemble him according to our measure. We shall thus most approve, and most enjoy ourselves, and thus become

SERMON
XX.Ephes.
v. 1.1 Pet.
iii. 10.1 Tim.
vi. 17.Psal.
xxxiv.
15.

most approved by him. For the same reason that God chuses to imploy his boundless wisdom and power in communicating good, he will be most pleased with those of his rational creatures, who most constantly imitate him; who cherish the tender and generous affections of their nature, are sensible to the wants and sufferings of others, and prompt to relieve them; who suppress selfish and injurious passions, and to their utmost remove evil and communicate good. And if they are thus *followers of God as dear children*, being approved by him, they will certainly be happy in his favour. That infinite goodness which overflows the creation will be peculiarly attentive to their welfare, supplying their wants, and securing their peace and enjoyment. No wise and good King would permit such a subject to receive any real hurt, could he prevent it; much less will the great Sovereign of the world, whose wisdom, power, and goodness are infinite. *Whosoever therefore loveth life, and desireth many days, wherein he may see good; let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile. Let the law of truth and kindness rule his lips. Let him depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it. Let him be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous or merciful,*
and

and his ears are open to their cry. What they give to the poor, they lend to the Lord, who will abundantly repay them. As certainly as they now concur with God in promoting his favourite design, the good of his creatures, so certainly will this most beneficent Being delight to distinguish them by his favour in this life, and his rewards to eternity.

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XX.
Prov.
xix. 17.

You will therefore, my Friends, welcome an opportunity of doing good, which now offers itself; by supporting a Charity-School for the instruction of Two Hundred poor Children in the principles of Religion, and in some of the most necessary arts of life. The Case will recommend itself. You will allow me to read it to you.

THE Foundation of it was laid in the Year 1687, in the reign of King *James II.* when a School was set up by one *Poulton* a Jesuit, and publick notice was given, that he would instruct the Children of the poor gratis; upon which Mr. *Arthur Shallet*, Mr. *Samuel Warburton*, and Mr. *Ferdinando Holland*, laid the foundation of this School, to avoid the dangerous consequences of a Popish School, and provide for the instruction of the Children of the poor in the Protestant way.

The number of Scholars at first was Forty, afterwards increased to Fifty, and

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now to Two Hundred; they are taught to read, write, and cypher, and are instructed in the principles of our common Christianity, and thereby qualified for the service of God and man. It may be said to be the first School the Protestant Dissenters were concerned in; here objects are received without distinction of Parties, the common good being intended.

It is situated in one of the poorest parts of this City, and the Children of the poorest sort of Watermen, Fishermen, and others, are here taught without any expence to their Parents, and are furnished with Bibles, Testaments, Catechisms, and Writing and Cyphering Books, and the Girls are taught to knit and work at their needle.

The charges have been defrayed by the gifts and subscriptions of private persons; with annual collections, and the kind remembrance of the said School by some in their last Wills.

Your generous assistance you see is wanted, and the goodness of the design deserves it. By your charitable concurrence, you will peculiarly conform to the pattern you have been contemplating. Our heavenly Father, though he liberally provides for our bodily wants, is more concerned to form us to knowledge, virtue, and piety, the purposes to which this Charity is peculiarly directed. Your assisting it will also

also be a prudent, as well as grateful acknowledgment of the divine goodness, in securing to us, by the successes of the last Year, the possession of our Religion and Liberties. For it is one of the best methods to prevent the Poor from being bred in ignorance, and easily seduced to Popery, and thus made instrumental in bringing their fellow-subjects under both religious and civil bondage.

Look then with a kind attention upon these numerous objects of your bounty. How pleasing the sight of so many rescued from ignorance and barbarity, adorned with cleanliness and civility, and in the way of attaining not only the necessary arts of life, but more valuable acquisitions, the knowledge and practice of true religion! What joy must it give the Parents hearts, to see that done by your bounty, for those so dear to them, for which they themselves were disabled by their Poverty! How affectionately will they thank God, and bless you! Let their hearts still enjoy this satisfaction, and your own the nobler satisfaction of giving it.

Let your thoughts, Sirs, pursue these Children into active life, formed by your bounty to cleanliness, civility, a religious knowledge and practice, and to other knowledge proper for rendering them useful members of Society. See them becoming diligent,

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diligent, modest, and faithful Servants, and the more respectful to their Superiors, for having experienced your generous kindness. Consider them as growing into heads of Families, and in part qualified by your bounty to instruct Children in religion and virtue, and to provide for them; and some of them perhaps, by the blessing of God on their honest skill and industry, to exercise abundantly towards future poor like charity, to that by which they have been so greatly benefited. Consider them farther, as becoming serious and sincere members of our christian Societies, and by the Grace of God, enabled to support and recommend the cause of Christianity, when we are gone off the stage. And hence let your thoughts rise to consider those of them, who thus improve your kind assistance, as becoming members of the heavenly society, and glorious and blessed in eternity; and think what a satisfaction it will give you, to behold any one of these in heaven, whom, through the divine blessing, you have helped to deliver from ignorance, vice, and misery, and render a proper object of the everlasting goodness of God, an accepted subject of your generous Redeemer, and a part of his glory and reward. Think of this and say, whether an equal expence on mere animal gratifications, or on the show of life, can yield you now, much less hereafter

after equal satisfaction; and then act as SERMON XX.
 your own wise consideration, and the good-
 ness of every honest heart will prompt.

We cannot enjoy the approbation and favour of a merciful God, unless we are according to our abilities merciful. We cannot possess the divine satisfactions of a benevolent heart, without doing good as we have opportunity. Nor can we partake in the immense rewards which everlasting goodness will confer, without cultivating and practising that *charity which endureth for ever*. Let us therefore when we leave this Place, begin the Year with doing good, and practise throughout it, what we are convinced will give us most satisfaction in life and death, and make us most happy to eternity.

3. Doth God *crown every Year with his Goodness*, how great is his goodness! How large the quantities of good enjoyed by the countless millions of mankind, in succession for so many thousand Years, and by all the other living creatures, inhabitants of our globe! And how immense that bounty which hath provided so much good for all these, and constantly dispenses it! Which constantly supplies the light and warmth of the Sun, directs the beneficial succession of the seasons, maintains the beauty and fertility of the earth, and is the immediate or remote author of every instance of pleasure

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XX.Psal. civ.
27.

sure and good, that is enjoyed through the world! If he is esteemed a kind Parent, who provides for his little Family whatever is convenient, with an unwearied care and tenderness, how infinitely kind our heavenly Father, on whom the eyes of all the creatures throughout the boundless creation wait, and who giveth to all their food in due season; continuing to all both the faculties and the objects of enjoyment. A kindness which did not once exert itself in an extraordinary manner, and then grow weary and abate, but which keeps an unaltered course; bringing into life, continually supporting and feeding creatures without number, at an infinite expence of wisdom, attention, and power; and which constantly observes the state and conduct of mankind, in order to train them to compleat and never-ending blessedness! How adorable this goodness, how much to be loved this best of Beings and of Parents! *O praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is everlasting. His tender mercies are over all his works, and his delights with the children of men.*

4. Doth the divine goodness crown every Year, and hath it filled the last with good? Let us begin this with a serious, chearful, and intire dedication of ourselves to God. Can we do better than devote ourselves to this best of Beings? Can we do less in return

turn for his great and constant kindness? SERMON
XX.
And can we act more prudently, than thus to place ourselves for the future under the conduct of infinite wisdom and benevolence? All that we are and have he gave; all we can hope the ensuing Year must be derived from his favour; and we can have no security from the many evils to which we are liable, but in his protection; and can we reasonably hope that he will still protect and bless us, if we are still unjust and ungrateful to him?

Have any then lived, hitherto, insensible to the goodness which they have constantly experienced; unconcerned to live to that God who upholds them in life, supplies their returning wants, and guards them from evil, and who hath long borne with their folly and ingratitude, that they might at length consider, and become grateful and obedient, and thus happy to eternity? Let them reflect seriously on the divine mercy and their unsuitable returns, and then resolve to live no longer insensible and ungrateful. Let them now retire, and pursue such thoughts as these, till their hearts are melted into an ingenuous repentance, and they become fully determined for living unto God. “O thou best of Beings, how
“ many Years hast thou maintained me in
“ life, though regardless of the hand which
“ upheld me! How numberless the fa-
“ yours

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“ vours which in the course of many Years
 “ thou hast conferred, although I have
 “ seldom seriously considered and acknow-
 “ ledged them ! How great the mercy
 “ which vouchsafed all these, with this
 “ kind intention, to lead a thoughtless In-
 “ grate to the love of his Benefactor, and
 “ thus to qualify him for infinitely better
 “ blessings ! How inexcusably foolish and
 “ guilty have I been, who have so long
 “ disregarded the God of my life, alienated
 “ from him my body and spirit which are
 “ his, and often dishonoured him with his
 “ gifts ! And shall I make another Year
 “ witness to like guilty ingratitude ? God
 “ forbid ! I am entering upon it, but how
 “ it will end with me I know not ; that
 “ it shall end happily I can with no reason
 “ expect, if I continue to neglect and abuse
 “ the divine lenity.

“ If I am now prevailed upon by the
 “ mercies of God to devote myself to him,
 “ and from this time make his word my
 “ rule ; and study to answer the purposes
 “ for which he hath placed me here, es-
 “ pecially to qualify myself for that spi-
 “ ritual and divine felicity, which he hath
 “ prepared for his servants in heaven, I
 “ may be certain that the Year will issue
 “ happily. I shall have the satisfactions
 “ arising from gratitude and confidence in
 “ God, and from the hopes of immortality,
 “ to

“ to improve the innocent enjoyments of
“ life; and I shall be secure under the
“ divine protection from every real evil,
“ and be supplied with whatever is conve-
“ nient. For certainly this infinitely good
“ Being, who, notwithstanding my dis-
“ obedience and ingratitude, hath crown-
“ ed my past Years with good, will abun-
“ dantly grant it for the future, if I thus
“ qualify myself for his favour.

“ *Thou art then my portion, O God, and*
“ *I will keep thy word.* I will not live
“ another Year out of thy favour, insensi-
“ ble and unthankful. I will take upon
“ myself the obligations of the Christian
“ Covenant, and thus secure the privileges
“ therein promised. To cherish the love
“ of this best of Beings, and to imitate
“ him, according to my scanty measure, in
“ doing good, shall be my delightful im-
“ ployment. And persevering in this
“ course, I cannot doubt but every future
“ Year will proceed happily still, advanc-
“ ing me to a higher title, and a nearer
“ view of the heavenly blessedness; where
“ that goodness which is only tasted here,
“ shall be fully enjoyed, and crown the
“ ages of eternity with compleat and un-
“ changing bliss.”

5. How firmly may the pious and virtu-
ous trust, and how greatly rejoice in this
goodness! The God in whom we exhort
you

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you to trust is not a Being far removed from our world, above regarding what passes in it, or indifferent to the well-being of his creature. No, he is constantly exerting his wisdom, power and bounty all around us. He is the author of the light and warmth of the Sun, of the fruitfulness of the earth, the beauties of the seasons, and of the life and activity of mankind, and of all the other creatures around us; and the constant displays of his perfections in our world, prove that his wisdom, power, and benevolence, are infinite. With what solid joy and satisfaction then, may they who endeavour by gratitude, obedience, and an imitation of his goodness and compassion, to recommend themselves to his approbation, think of his presence, and rejoice in his protection and supplies! For as our divine Master reasons, God *who cloaths the lillies, and feeds the fowls*, will much more take care of his children, who are dutiful, and more excellent in their nature than the other. Would a prudent and tender Parent fail to relieve, protect, and provide, for a dutiful Child when it was in his power, when he knew his wants, and could with ease supply them; or would he permit him to suffer any real hurt? Certainly not. And may we not then with much juster confidence, rely on the wisdom, power and kindness of our heavenly Father,

with his Goodness.

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Father, which we see constantly exerted SERMON
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around us.

Let the pious, righteous, and merciful, then trust and rejoice in the Lord. Let us all become of this number. And then as certainly, as we now see and feel the divine bounty crowning the Years of this mortal life, we shall experience his unbounded goodness, enriching the ages of eternity with consummate and everlasting blessedness.

God bless what you have heard, as a means of making us all so wise and happy.
Amen.



L 1

A Chro-

For, which we too constantly exerted

around us.

Let the spirit, righteous, and merciful

then rule and reign in the heart. Let us

all become of this number. And then is

eternity. As we now feel the divine

power renewing the years of this mortal

life, we shall experience its unbounded

glories, fulfilling the law of charity

with love, kindness and forgiving hearts.

And

God bless what you have heard, amen.

24 OCT 62



A Chronological and particular
ACCOUNT of the WRITINGS of the
Reverend THOMAS AMORY, D.D.

S E R M O N S.

I. **C**HRISt the Light of the World;
or the principal improvements
made in Religion by Christianity; at the
Young Men's Lecture in Exeter, September 9, 1735, at the Assembly of the united
protestant dissenting Ministers of Devon
and Cornwall; published at the request of
the young Gentlemen, and of a great num-
ber of Ministers present.

JOHN viii. 12.

This Discourse was part of a Sett of
Sermons on the Evidences of the Christian
Religion. The preface exhibiteth the
plan of the Reasoning in which that im-
portant argument was treated; and par-
ticularly represents the doctrines and pre-
cepts which the Gospel hath added to
natural Religion, which though Reason

L 1 2

could

could not easily and fully discover, yet are suitable to the state of man, worthy of the perfections of God, and highly advantageous for us to know and practise.

This judicious and laboured Discourse met with such a general reception, that the whole Impression was soon disposed of.

It was republished in 1758, in a Volume of Eighteen Sermons, 8vo. sold by J. Buckland, in Pater-noster-Row,

Dr. Thomas Morgan, the author of a book intitled, "The Moral Philosopher," thought fit to make Objections to some principles advanced in this Sermon; as repugnant to his scheme of Infidelity, which being sent in manuscript to the Author, he made a proper reply to them in a brief confutation.

II. The Character and Blessedness of those to whom to live is Christ, and to die gain, at Ilminster, in the County of Somerset, May 25, 1738, on occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. James Strong, *Ætat.* 53. 8vo.

PHILIPPIANS i. 21.

III. The nature of Sound Doctrine, and the encouragements to preach it; a Charge delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. William Harris, at Wells, in the County of Somerset, April 15, 1741.
Pub-

Published at the request of the Ministers present, and the principal Hearers.

TITUS ii. 1.

Published with the Sermon on that occasion by the Rev. Mr. Samuel Billingsley, intituled, "The Character of Saint Paul as a Preacher considered and recommended."

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

IV. Self-dedication to God explained and recommended, in Two Sermons, with a particular view to the New Year; with a prefatory address to young persons, inculcating various considerations and motives to determine them to devote themselves to God. Dec. 25, 1742. 12mo.

A second edition of these Discourses was published 1751.

V. The Prayer of King Jehosophat considered and applied to the state of the Nation; at Taunton, December 18, 1745, on occasion of the Fast, on account of the War and the unnatural Rebellion. Published at the request of the Audience. 8vo.

2 CHRON. xx. 5—13.

A second edition of this Sermon was published soon after the first.

VI. Daily Devotion assisted and recommended, in Four Sermons; representing the principal instances of the Providence

and Goodness of God, which every Morning and Evening offer to our thoughts, and the use we should make of them. 1747. 8vo.

PSALM iii. 5. PSALM xcii. 2.

In a second edition, 1770, Dr. Amory added some forms of Prayer for a Family, for Morning and Evening.

VII. Eight Sermons on a future General Judgment; representing the great events introductory to the coming of Christ to Judgment, and the end of the world — the certainty, solemnity, and consequences of that decisive season — the persons who are to be judged, — and the talents and actions for which they must give an account. Dedicated to the Congregation at Taunton, the Author's pastoral Charge, who earnestly desired the publication, 1749. 8vo.

MATT. xxv. 31, 32. 2 COR. v. 10.

These Discourses were republished in the Volume of Eighteen Sermons.

VIII. The Character and Blessedness of those who die in the Lord; at Bridgwater, Jan. 6. 1748, on occasion of the Death of the Reverend John Moore, M. A. Ætat. 76.

Republished in the Volume of Eighteen Sermons.

REVELATION xiv. 13.

IX.

IX. Ministers not lords over the Faith of Christians, but helpers of their joy; at Lewin's-Mead, Bristol, at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. William Richards, May 22, 1751. 8vo.

Published with the Charge delivered on that occasion, by the Rev. Mr. Samuel Billingsley, intitled, "The rule of conduct for Christian Ministers represented."

1 TIMOTHY iv. 16.

X. Our Times in the Hand of God; at Culliton, in the County of Devon, March 8, 1752, on occasion of the Death of Mrs. Mary Slater, wife of the Rev. Mr. Samuel Slater, Ætat. 30. 8vo.

PSALM xxxi. 15.

XI. Six Sermons on Contentment, and Two Sermons on the reasonableness of Religion, and the advantages of Prayer, 1753.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 11. JOB xxi. 15.

These Discourses were also republished in the Volume of Eighteen Sermons.

XII. The Shortness and Frailty of human Life represented and accounted for, on occasion of the Death of John Halliday, Esq; Member of Parliament for Taunton, June 9, 1754, Ætat. 44. 8vo.

JOB xiv. 2.

L 1 4

XIII.

XIII. The Care which Ministers should take of themselves, and of their doctrine, recommended; a Charge delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Wright, at Lewin's-Mead, Bristol, May 31, 1759.

1 TIMOTHY iv. 16.

Published together with the Questions proposed on that occasion by the Rev. Mr. William Richards, and Mr. Wright's Answers, and the Sermon, intitled, "Preaching the Gospel a more effectual method of Salvation, than human wisdom and philosophy," by the Rev. Samuel Chandler, D. D. 8vo.

1 CORINTHIANS i. 21.

XIV. Habitual Religion explained and recommended, in Three Sermons; at Taunton, September 1759. 8vo.

PSALM xvi. 8.

XV. God crowneth the Year with his Goodness; at St. Thomas's, Jan. 1, 1760, for the benefit of the Charity-School in Gravel-lane, Southwark. Published at the request of the managers of the School. 8vo.

PSALM lxxv. 11.

XVI. The motives and obligations to love and good works represented; at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. Edward Harwood, of Bristol, and the Rev. Mr. Benjamin

Jamin Davis, of Marlborough, at the Old Jewry, October 16, 1765.

HEBREWS x. 24.

To which are annexed the Questions proposed to Mr. Harwood on that occasion by the Rev. Mr. Samuel Billingsley and Mr. Harwood's Answers, and his Confession of Faith; together with the Charge, by the Rev. Samuel Chandler, D. D. 8vo.

2 TIMOTHY ii. 15.

XVII. Dying in faith explained; and the happiness of it represented; on occasion of the Death of the Rev. Samuel Chandler, D. D. who died May 8, 1766, Ætat. 73, at the Old Jewry, May 18.

HEBREWS xi. 13.

To which are added the Speech at his Interment, and a Catalogue of Dr. Chandler's Writings.

N. B. In the year 1758 were collected into one Volume and republished, Eighteen Sermons, No. I. VII. VIII. and XI.

XVIII. Twenty-two Sermons on the following Subjects.

1, 2, 3. The divine Goodness explained, and proved, and illustrated in various instances.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

4, 5. In

4, 5. . . . In the creation of Man, and various laws of the human constitution.

PSALM viii. 5.

6, 7. The Goodness of divine Providence to mankind.

MATTHEW v. 45.

8, 9. The Grace of GOD in the Redemption of man by JESUS CHRIST.

EPHESIANS ii. 5.

10. The principal properties of the divine Benevolence.

PSALM cxxxvi. 1.

11. Of moral Evil; and that the permission of it is consistent with the divine Goodness.

12. The objection of the abundance of moral Evil farther urged and illustrated.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

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